

Highly Skilled Algerian Women Displaced During the Black Decade: Online Networks,  
Transnational Belonging and Political Engagement

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## **Abstract**

The contemporary era of global transformations has re-oriented academic debates on the growth of non-nation-based solidarities and transnational cultural constructions. Despite this, social constructionists suggest that the concept of ‘diaspora’ continues to privilege the notion of ethnicity as the point of origin in the construction of solidarity between migrants, overlooking the differences of social class and gender. This research interrogates this contention by exploring the role of gender in shaping diaspora – a complex process by which migrant women articulate new identities and give new social and political meanings to their relationships with one another, with co-nationals living elsewhere and with an imagined ‘homeland’. It investigates the motivation behind the emigration of highly skilled Algerian women during the ‘Black Decade’ of the 1990s and its aftermath, and looks at the agendas of this particular set of migrants, the extent to which they feel they belong to a diaspora, and their attitude towards returning ‘home’. Their political engagement takes a variety of forms, but the research reveals that certain modes of online discourse and manifestations of a diasporic social consciousness are common to their self-presentation. In order to investigate their networks, I used Social Networking Websites Analysis (mainly Facebook) and a Respondent-Driven-Sampling (RDS) method to sample and recruit participants, coupled with 15 in-depth interviews. The majority of participants cited the amnesty law (which absolved the perpetrators of violence during the 1990s, including violence against women, of their crimes) and the rise of radical Islamist ideology as the main barriers to considering present-day Algeria as ‘home’. Participants appeared to exhibit both a sense of exile and a desire to be part of a diaspora.

## Acronyms

ABC	Algeria British Connection
AI	Amnesty International
AIDA	Association Internationale de La Diaspora Algérienne
AIS	Armée Islamique du Salut
ALN	Armée de Libération Nationale
ANP	Armée Nationale Populaire
ASC	Algerian Solidarity Campaign
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
EU	European Union
EP	European Parliament
FFS	Front des Forces Socialistes
FIDA	Fédération Internationale de la Diaspora Algérienne
FIS	Front Islamique du Salut
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale
GIA	Groupes Islamique Armés
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
NAC	National Algerian Centre
PAGS	Parti d'Avant-Garde Socialiste
PCF	Parti Communiste Français
PT	Parti des Travailleurs
RAFD	Rassemblement Algérien des Femmes Démocrates
RCD	Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie
SOS	Femmes en Détresse
UGTA	Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens

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## **Dedication**

*This thesis is dedicated to Lina , Imene and Nadji, for their patience, their cuddles and their love, and to all who have survived the Black Decade.*

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **General context of the research: migration, globalisation and diaspora**

According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), by 2015 the number of displaced people worldwide had reached 244 million, which equates to approximately three percent of the world's population (IOM, 2015). In addition, there are an estimated 19 million refugees, and 25 million people around the world who have been internally displaced, mainly as a result of conflict. Around 50 percent of these are women and children (UNHCR, 2016). The phenomenon of migration, therefore, not only concerns every country it touches, but also challenges the very notion of the nation-state and its constructed borders, as shown by the recent 'refugee crisis' at the European Union's external border, for example in the migrant camps in Calais and Lesbos. Indeed, between January and May 2016, an estimated 2,443 migrants have drowned in the Mediterranean in the attempt to reach what has become known as 'Fortress Europe' (IOM, 2016).

Although the recent attention focused on migration gives it the appearance of a specifically modern phenomenon, it has always been a feature of the world stage, a manifestation of wide disparities in socio-economic circumstances, and has long been regarded as a potential means of improving life or human security. However, during the post-Cold War and post-9/11 periods, and more recently, the Syrian civil war, migration has assumed new dimensions and patterns. Analysts and academics from different disciplines suggest that various contemporary changes have caused the mass exodus of populations, re-shaping patterns of population movements (Van Hear, 1998). Technological transformations and the emergence of ethnic, religious and nationalist conflicts have resulted in national and worldwide instabilities, particularly in the Global South, furthering population displacement (Human Development Report, 2009). Recently, another force – global warming – has generated a new wave of forcibly displaced populations. Added to this, the globalisation of the world market has cemented pathways that encourage the movement of skilled workers and professionals from developing countries to fill gaps in the labour markets of more developed countries (Castles and Miller, 2009). Despite the intentions of policy-makers in the receiving countries, a large proportion of these 'guest-workers' do not return after ending their work

contracts, even if their overstay is deemed illegal, placing them in a state of economic insecurity and social discrimination. Children, who have either arrived as dependents or are born in the receiving country, are often cast into a confusing situation: even though they may feel more at home there, they frequently continue to experience the same discrimination as their parents (Weiner, 1996).

On the one hand, globalisation creates the idea that people will gain from migrating to richer and more secure countries, increasing the pressures to do so, while on the other it propagates negative perceptions and fears in the receiving countries concerning the political, social and security consequences of migration (Bakewell, 2008). The dominant political and media discourses on migration, and hence public opinion, in the receiving countries are increasingly subject to political manipulation, particularly around fears such as loss of national identity (Papademetriou, 2012). Despite the declaration by the US, the dominant global power at the end of the Cold War, of a 'new world order' promising peace and plenty, it displayed extreme incompetence in managing the social issues that resulted from the re-composition of new states, the creation of new borders and the redefinition of people's identities (Chomsky, 2001). Noam Chomsky argues that the problems of identity recognition and negotiation in this new global context increased ethnocentrism and racism in most western countries, and this has been reinforced by the rise of Islamophobia after 9/11 (Carr, 2016). The practices of contemporary globalisation have thus encouraged the rise of racism alongside an increase in the claims of indigenous ethnicities (Castles and Miller, 2009; Salomos and Wrench, 1993). Translated into policies and social practices, these claims not only result in keeping people excluded in the Global South, but also deepen the disparities suffered by minorities living in western countries (or the Global North). The rise in nationalism and hostility towards migrants has fueled the popularity of right-wing ideologues within many European societies (Skenderovic, 2007). According to James Carr (2016, p.2), the so-called 'war on terror' initiated after 9/11 has created an 'anti-Muslim racism' that has exacerbated an "Islamophobia in western public opinion that spans centuries".

The fact that international migration has become such an intrinsic feature of globalisation highlights the importance of researching the nature of different migrant groups and communities, including investigation into whether they belong to a network,

engage in political discourse and activities with their compatriots, retain a relationship with their country of origin, entertain the ambition of returning, or simply become isolated individuals who melt into their host societies. Such research demands an understanding of transnationalism, diaspora and/or exile as not only a social condition but also a state of mind, and this can be accomplished by using the concept of 'diaspora' as an analytical tool. As Nicholas Van Hear (1998) and Nina Glick Schiller (2009) suggest, globalisation has meant the unavoidable creation of new social, political and economic networks among migrants, often spanning several societies. It is the formation of these networks that has been commonly identified as 'transnationalism' – or 'diaspora' if the network becomes involved in projects for change in the country of origin.

Robin Cohen (2008, 2010) argues that not only do contemporary scholars of migration need to recognise the potency of diaspora as a concept, but they must also be flexible and open to novel uses of the term, and acknowledge its global evolution. This advice has become increasingly relevant since the release of the UNDP Human Development Report 2009, 'Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development', which emphasises the impact of the movements of people on the socio-economic development of both their home countries and receiving countries. As a result, new academic branches studying, researching and teaching migration, transnationalism and diaspora have emerged from within various existing disciplines (Bakewell, 2008; Brubaker, 2005).

This research takes into account Cohen's advice. It is based on the assumption that diasporas have captured both transnational and national spaces due to the role they play in social, cultural and economic development, as well as the influence they have on policy debates within sending and receiving societies. James Clifford (1994), however, stresses that durability is a necessary condition for the establishment of a diasporic consciousness; it needs to be tested by time as well as by other social constructs because, as Cohen (1997) argues, migrants do not necessarily consider themselves as belonging to a diaspora at the point of arrival. Although I believe that diaspora is essentially a political concept, and have some reservations about using the term, if only as a prototype, I have found Cohen's arguments (see the literature review below for a more detailed exposition) highly relevant for this research, and have taken them as a starting point from which to define the concept

when using it to study my sample of highly skilled women who fled the increase of violence in Algeria in the 1990s. My research has been further influenced by the work of Floya Anthias (1998), which is grounded in feminist and black literature (Hall, 1990; Gilroy, 1993; Clifford, 1994; Brah, 1996) and considers diaspora to be a socially constructed condition rather than simply a description of a given group of the same ethnicity (see the literature review below).

### **Research questions**

This research addresses the following specific themes:

1. The extent to which the lack of freedom of thought, the restrictions associated with the Algerian Family Code, and the increased levels of violence against women motivated highly skilled women to flee Algeria during the internal conflict of the 1990s.
2. The barriers this group of women have faced in rebuilding their lives in the countries to which they migrated, and the barriers to returning to Algeria.
3. The professional, social and political networks, including online networks, which these women have created, primarily to promote their chances of resuming their professional lives in their countries of migration. The research investigates if and how these networks are indicative of a diasporic consciousness and thus could be mobilised to contribute to projects promoting the reform of women's position in Algeria.

### **Significance, motivation and aims of the research**

The importance of this research rests on two facts. Firstly, highly skilled female migrants have frequently been neglected by researchers and policy-makers. Migrant women in general, have been represented in a stereotypical manner as passive dependents, and as “victims and needy” (Morokvasic, 1984). Secondly, although there is a substantial body of literature on Algerian migrants in France due to the importance of North African migration there in terms of its size and social significance (Sayad, 2007), there has been very little research into the category of highly skilled Algerian women who migrated to countries other than France during the internal conflict of the 1990s. For example, Michael Collyer (2004, 2006, 2008) is one of the few researchers to have carried out significant research on Algerians in the UK. Thus, by placing highly skilled Algerian women who

fled the traumatic internal conflict of the 1990s at the centre of an investigation into diasporic consciousness, this research breaks new ground.

Thirdly, I left Algeria nearly at the end of the black decade, in 2003. And so, I have witnessed the departure of hundreds of colleagues fleeing the country. In fact, only in the research centers I was representing at the UGTA Union branch of High Education and Scientific Research, in between 1993 and 2003, more than 20 PhDs, senior researchers, research assistants, have left the country, half of them were women. That was one of the most distressing issue happening in Algeria at the time. Hundreds of students were left without teachers, lecturers, supervisors, several research projects were abandoned, and other patients without consultants and so on.

Once I arrived to the UK, I met Algerian females, who had been university lecturers back home, dispersed across the UK under the asylum seekers dispersal policy of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Unlike me, they were holding their PhD from the UK, have left UK after finishing their studies and came back to flee terrorism. Despite that, they were struggling with adjustment and the process of rebuilding a professional life. The main barrier was the endless gender-blind asylum process they found themselves in. I also knew of many other women who migrated to France, often previously graduated from France, who were facing barriers in finding jobs related to their high profile, particularly doctors in medicine and lawyers.

On the other side, the Algerian regime was denying any mass exodus of highly skilled Algerians due to the black decade, and definitely not recognizing any feminization of highly skilled Algerian migration as a result of the cancellation of the electoral process. My thesis was then to argue against this and to reveal the existence of a network of highly qualified /highly skilled Algerian women who fled the country at the time.

Moreover , It has been argued that feelings of belonging to a cohesive diaspora are relatively weak among Algerian migrants because of the significant political, linguistic and other differences within the Algerian community, especially between those who migrated (specifically to France) during the 1960s and 1970s and those who arrived in the 1990s (Sayad, 2004; Begag, 2002). The highly skilled and generally politically involved

Algerians forced out of the country during the 1990s contrasted greatly with the rural or low-skilled men and their spouses, daughters or dependents associated with earlier migration flows (Collyer, 2006). It could be argued, however, that in fact several Algerian diasporic networks have been created in different times and spaces, and under different circumstances. Also, as Collyer (2008, p.694) points out, “[t]he Algerian diaspora has always been a focal point for political innovation and contestation. For the first years of Algerian independence, the ruling regime therefore paid great attention to developments in France and developed sophisticated surveillance methods” to track its nationals living abroad.

However, it is true that the experience of women who migrated during and after the 1990s differs from that of previous waves of Algerian migration, and as a consequence it has often been associated with forms of resistance and solidarity. This can be illustrated by the case of Fatiha and Maamoura, two survivors of the so-called ‘Hassi Messouad event’. On 13 July 2001 at Hassi Messaoud, a southern Algerian city centred around the production of oil, a group of local men attacked, abused and raped more than a hundred women (Kaci, 2010). They were incited by a local imam, who issued a call to ‘cleanse’ the city of ‘impure women’ (Lezzar, 2006). The majority of these women were divorced, widowed or single mothers who had been internally displaced from other parts of Algeria and had come to the city to look for work and to escape the harsh patriarchal rules they were forced to submit to in their own communities due to their social status (Lamarene-Djeral, 2006). In the eyes of their aggressors, however, they were all ‘prostitutes’ and a threat to the community (Kaci, 2010). Although the majority of these women were silenced and constrained from speaking out, Fatiha and Maamoura managed to leave the country. Once in France they met Nadia Kaci, an Algerian artist and writer who had left Algeria in the 1990s. Kaci recorded their testimonies and published a book, *Left for Dead: The Lynching of Women in Hassi Messaoud* (Kaci, 2010). This gives a detailed account of the horrors that occurred during the night of the attack, and also describes the juridical and social context of the event, including an exposition of the status of women in Algeria (Lezzar, 2006).

Some political protests have also succeeded in uniting different Algerian women migrants, although they appear to have often been relatively short-lived. During his

fieldwork on the Kabyle<sup>1</sup> diaspora in Marseille, a French city often referred to as the 49th *wilaya* (district) of Algeria, Collyer (2008) joined a march organised in protest at the bloody events of April 2001 in Algiers and other Kabilyan cities following the death of a young man in custody in a Kabyle police station (*Courrier International*, 31/5/2001). Most of the organisations represented at the protest were composed of Kabyle migrants, but the Algerian Rally of Democratic Women (RAFD), which included women who were not Kabyle, was also present, illustrating that migrant Algerian women do participate in national debates and political struggles despite the implicit (and sometimes overt) gender power relations and regional animosities found in many of the political organisations (Lalami, 2012). Collyer relates the response of one non-Kabyle woman who had joined the protest:

One of [these women] told me: “Some of the Berbers you meet are worse than the *Front National* – they won’t talk to you because you’re Arab. I’ve come here today because it’s important, but I don’t normally hang out with these people.” This woman felt that what happened in Kabyle was of concern to all Algerians. (Collyer, 2008, p.699)

The events in Kabyle provoked a degree of international mobilisation, and protests were also held in Paris, Brussels, London, Washington and different towns in Morocco (Collyer, 2008). However, whether these series of protests were coordinated by a transnational diasporic network remains uncertain, and Collyer argues that these movements lost the ability to mobilise Algerians living abroad, fading away once the regime suppressed the protests in Algeria itself.

By contrast, an example of the potential for continuity among politically active networks, as well as an illustration of their impact on both the diasporic and the wider international consciousness, is the story of what occurred after the massacre of Bentalha in September 1997. A witness to the events, Nesroulah Yous, was able to reach France, where he organised small meetings to publicise what had happened and tried to inform the wider international community by addressing the European Parliament (Algeria Watch,

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<sup>1</sup> Kabyle is a Berberophone area situated in the north of Algeria.



1997). It was through one of these meetings that he met Salima Mellah, a female Algerian journalist based in Germany, who helped him write a book publicising the massacre, *Qui a tué à Bentalha?* (*Who Killed at Bentalha?*) (Yous, 2000). Once it was published in November 2000, parts of the European media began to pay attention to the situation in Algeria, leading to an increase in international public debates about human rights abuses during the country's internal conflict of the 1990s, known as the 'Black Decade'. Even if the accuracy of some of its details could be questioned, the book's content captured widespread attention and generated a series of public demonstrations not only in France but also in Canada and Germany, which were attended by well-known politicians and intellectuals. At the same time, a number of prominent Western intellectuals, including Noam Chomsky (1999) and Lord Eric Avebury (1999), expressed their strong criticism of the Algerian regime, while others such as Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Derrida expressed their support for the intellectuals assassinated by radical Islamists (Grenfell, 2004). One of the more long-term outcomes, however, was that Salima Mellah, the journalist who facilitated Yous's book, became the director of Algeria Watch<sup>2</sup>, an association created in Germany in 1997 to campaign for human rights in Algeria. In 2002 Algeria Watch was officially recognised under the 1901 French law on associations and has since become a well-established resource. Its website, translated into German, French and English, publishes articles and reports in cooperation with human rights advocates in Algeria and elsewhere, and is consulted daily by hundreds of Algerians living outside the country.

This research, therefore, investigates the existence of transnational networks of highly skilled and highly educated Algerian female migrants and examines attempts to use these to mobilise and engage in political projects for positive social change in the country following the tragedy of the 1990s. It also explores the ways in which policy-making, both in the receiving countries (specifically, immigration policies and policies of integration and representation) and at home, shape or influence the relationship that Algerian women have with their co-nationals, male and female, in their countries of migration, in their country of origin and in other countries.

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<sup>2</sup> Algeria Watch is an organisation campaigning for human rights in Algeria. See: [http://www.algeria-watch.org/fr/aw/aw\\_presentation.htm](http://www.algeria-watch.org/fr/aw/aw_presentation.htm)

## **Literature review**

### *Defining diaspora(s) and diasporic consciousness*

In this section I explore the idea of diaspora, one of the key concepts used in my research. I consider it to be far more than just a descriptive term for a community of people living outside their country of origin as its current use – including by some scholars and policy-makers – often seems to suggest. Rather, I concur with Anthias's (1998) definition of it as a heuristic device that helps to explore the experience of people who end up displaced and scattered abroad, often following a traumatic event.

Initially, scholars of diaspora believed that, in order to investigate and understand the concept more fully, it was necessary to consider the Jewish experience as paradigmatic; all current groups of migrants could measure themselves against this experience and either identify themselves as a diaspora or reject the term. Perhaps one of the true counterparts of the Jewish diaspora in this respect is that of the Palestinians, a diaspora that was born out of the creation of the Israeli state in 1948 (Schultz, 2003). The various debates over the term that have taken place more recently, however, are all evidence of the urge to question this classical conception of diaspora. There seems to be a growing consensus that it is necessary for scholars to be aware of the changes in migration experiences and to appreciate the new meanings these experiences may bestow on the term. Diaspora scholars such as Cohen (1997, 2008, 2010), Hall (1990, 1993), Safran (1991, 1999), Clifford (1992, 1994) and Tölölyan (1996, 2011) have moved to a conception of diaspora as a 'metaphoric designation' that could be used to describe a far wider range of displaced people. James Clifford (1994) and Rogers Brubaker (2005) share the same ideas on the proliferation in the meanings of the term diaspora, while Clifford goes on to suggest that it connects with the experiences of multiple other communities of dispersed populations. He argues that an overlap between border crossing and diasporic experiences occurred during the late-20th century. The growth of the global market led to the rapid development of global means of communication, with easier air travel, mobile phones, the internet and cyberspace, all of which helped reduce distances between countries of origin and first (or second) receiving countries, and encouraged the increase of population movements and border crossings, both 'legal' and those deemed 'illegal'.

Rainer Bauböck (2007) has also pointed to the way that the appearance in different societies of migrants of various status has made a decisive contribution to what he describes as the emergence of 'inter-state societies'. Robin Cohen (1997, p.162) has developed similar arguments, which present the new pattern of migration as "challenging and transcending the limits of the nation-state". The emergence of 'transnational populations', endowed with multiple commitments to various places but not totally disconnected from their homelands, attracted much academic and policy interest during the last quarter of the 20th century, which focused on the development of what is called a 'diasporic consciousness' (Van Hear, 1998, p.4). More recently, Peggy Levitt and Nadya Jaworsky (2007) have tracked the changes in the scholarly study of migration which ultimately show that contemporary migrants, supported by new technologies and social networking websites, always maintain some kind of relationship with their country of birth. As a result, new kinds of migrants are appearing, comprising those whose networks, activities and patterns of life encompass both their host societies and countries of origin.

According to Cohen (2012), the development of a diasporic consciousness amongst a group of migrants or a minority group always reflects a certain degree of unease with living in the host community. In evoking and trying to identify themselves with a diaspora, displaced people who have lost their homeland are in fact trying to reconstruct and revalorise their notion of an 'imagined homeland'. Diasporic consciousness, Cohen (2012) argues, is not only about recovering an historical memory, but is also concerned with building social networks that lead to the creation of political organisations for which this imaginary homeland remains a continuing pole of attraction and identification. However, Cohen (2008, pp1-16) also speaks of 'creolisation', a term he uses to analyse the emerging characteristics of people's identity in this global era, encompassing such ideas as 'cultural complexity', 'cosmopolitanism', 'hybridity' and 'mixture'. Creolisation, Cohen says, is a notion of the 'here and now', a feeling that annihilates old attachments to particular places and roots in an attempt to create a new locus of identification.

As William Safran (1991) points out, it appears that the term diaspora now describes vast categories of dispersed populations who either have chosen to identify themselves as such or have had the label imposed on them. As well as the high number of people belonging to this new group, with their varied historical experiences and collective

narratives, and their different relationships with their receiving societies and countries of origin, they are also defined by the different characteristics of their diasporas, unlike the groups designated in diaspora studies' classical phase. In a recent work, Cohen (2010) puts forward seven criteria or attributes that identify a group as a diaspora: the action of dispersal and scattering; the collective trauma behind the scattering; the group's cultural flowering within a new environment; the difficulty of integration in this environment; the feeling of belonging to a particular community; the transcendence of national borders; and finally the cultivation of the idea of return. Cohen uses these attributes to help identify five types of diasporic community: victim diasporas; labour diasporas; trade diasporas; imperial diasporas; and cultural diasporas. He admits, however, that these categories are not fixed: a diasporic community can take two or more of these forms or can transform over time from one type into another.

While stressing that he has no intention of diminishing the unspeakable nature of the tragedies visited upon the Jews over the centuries, Cohen (2008) explains that the catastrophic origins of the Jewish diaspora may have been too exclusively associated with the meaning of diaspora per se in the collective consciousness. Nevertheless, it is important for this study to acknowledge that in the four prototypical/classical diasporas Cohen cites, their historic dispersal was overwhelmingly caused by catastrophic events. As well as the Jews, Cohen (2010) mentions the slave trade, emphasising the particularity of the transportation of around 10 million black Africans across the Atlantic. Their experience when transported to America is now widely recognised as the tragedy that later helped establish the African diaspora. Meanwhile, regarding the Armenians, Cohen (2010) recounts both their earlier expulsions by the Byzantine emperor in the 6th century and their wide-spread involvement in commerce and trade over the ensuing centuries. However, there was one crucial catastrophic event that led to their recognition as a 'victim diaspora': their forced deportation from Turkey by the Ottoman Empire during 1915-16. In fact, 1.75 million Armenians were deported to Palestine and Syria, some of whom later migrated to France and the US. It is generally accepted that this mass deportation involved the genocide of at least a million Armenians, although official Turkish historiographies continue to deny this. Equally, the mass migration of the Irish between 1845 and 1852, due to the great famine, as Cohen (2010) explains, is widely regarded as the tragic origins

of the Irish diaspora. However, as in the Armenian case in Turkey, Irish historians have debated the fundamental significance of the famine in engendering Irish transatlantic migration during the 19th century. Christine Kinealy (1995) suggests that there was much more deliberation in the British policy of encouraging mass migration in response to the potato blight than has previously been reported. She asserts that the British government had a hidden agenda of population control, the modernisation of Irish agriculture and land reform, and it was the implementation of these policies that motivated the Irish exodus. As their experience is considered to be similar to that of the Jews, Armenians and Africans, the Irish have become labelled, first and foremost, as a 'victim diaspora' (Kinealy, 1995).

Referring to the case of Palestinian refugees, Bassma Kodmani-Darwish (1997) also speaks of "emergent or latent diasporas", emphasising that the term diaspora gives a group of displaced people who are seeking national legitimacy some kind of recognition which they can use to mobilise politically. She explains how the Palestinians have benefited from the adoption of the concept: it has enabled Palestinian refugees to take advantage of a framework that potentially allows them to contribute towards building a future state (Kodmani-Darwish, 1997). Another, contrasting, example of the 'making' of a diaspora and its impact on the country of origin is an Indian one. Dr. A. Didar Singh<sup>3</sup> (2011), Secretary General of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, acknowledged this when he said that "[a]t present, we [have] the world's highest number of returned professionals who are making a phenomenal contribution to the local economy. This trend also proves that the policies of engagement with the diaspora are beginning to show results." I attended this conference for the purposes of this research and I noticed the presence of several senior Indian policy-makers from various sectors networking and engaging with academics, and paying particular attention to academics of Indian origin working in overseas universities.

If engaging in transnational practices has been encouraged by globalisation, it has also been greatly facilitated by the rise of diverse and accessible communication technologies. Anastasia Christou (2006) points out, however, that real and virtual networks between displaced people become easier and stronger only if they enable the

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<sup>3</sup> Inaugural speech by Dr. A. Didar Singh at the International Conference on Migration, Diaspora and Development, New Delhi, September 2011.

reinforcement of their identification as sharing a common fate as an 'exiled population'. Subject to permanent questioning, these identifications are part of a process of identity construction focused around what and where 'home' is, a concept that is often considered by scholars of diaspora as describing an imaginary place. As such, the feeling of belonging to a particular place or community is continuously negotiated in the diaspora (Clifford, 1994). On the one hand, Ninna Nyberg-Sorenson (2007) suggests that the studies of transnationalism and diaspora can be distinguished from one another by the presence or absence of a relationship to a particular place: not all those who engage in transnational practices, moving or trading between different places, are necessarily diasporic; they may simply be operating as networks of people with a limited feeling of belonging to any particular place. On the other hand, however, although this separation between transnational practices and diaspora seems defensible, diasporas cannot be totally separated from transnationalism since diasporic engagement in transnational practices has become one of the essential characteristics of a diaspora, and is especially encouraged by the increasing use of online social networking – an area that this research investigates. The so-called 'Arab Spring' provided powerful evidence for this argument.

However, transnational social networking practices cannot necessarily be identified as diasporic; the people engaged in these practices do not automatically develop a diasporic consciousness. Some of these groups operate as networks of migrants who do not necessarily place any importance on committing themselves to projects in their home countries, and even less to specifically building relationships with other migrants from their countries of origin. According to Nyberg-Sorenson (2007, p.7), while transnational practices are supposed to dissolve permanent ideas about identity, place and community, diasporic identity is assumed to be constructed around attempts to 'fix' or 'knit' the sense of identity and community with a particular place, albeit imaginary. It is this process that differentiates diverse displaced groups from one another, allowing only a certain number of them to be elevated to the rank of diaspora (Bakewell, 2008). This research similarly distinguishes between transnational migration and diaspora by placing emphasis on the use of the term diaspora as carrying a political sense. However, although the memory of a dispersed people is often based on the same event that caused their displacement, this can later become a source of confrontation and argument rather than a unifying factor. I

will explain later how, in the case of Algeria, the cancellation of the electoral process which triggered the tragedy of the Black Decade was seen by one side in the political argument as a military coup and by the other as the army's defence of republican values against radical Islam.

As Cohen (2012) asserts, therefore, the idea of diaspora is provocative: not only does it denote a common trauma, but it also raises the question of who was responsible for that trauma. The sense of 'belonging' to a diaspora is negotiated within this process of identification, whether at a local, trans-local or virtual level, transcending physical borders (Davies, 2007), but these negotiations overlap, rival and oppose each other. Thus, the term diaspora is more than a description of a social condition; it also refers to socially constructed political struggles. This definition of the concept best reflects the experience of the selected set of highly skilled Algerian women migrants represented in this research, based on the assumption that these women are strongly connected to Algeria, either entertaining the hope of return or expressing a continuing interest in political developments in Algeria and a commitment to combatting the abuse of women's rights in the country.

The current debate over the definitions of transnationalism and diaspora is linked to the debate over the inclusivity/exclusivity of the concept of diaspora itself. Some scholars of migration argue that whereas the term was traditionally grounded in the experience of forced dispersion it should now be inclusive of other migrant groups. Thus, James Clifford (1994), Khachig Tölölyan (1991) and William Safran (1991) claim that the term should also encompass those individuals who are now most characteristic of transnational migration in that they are motivated to migrate by a plethora of reasons. Nevertheless, some groups or individuals are not viewed as a diaspora per se; Van Hear (1998, p.47) talks about "diasporas in the making and diasporas unmade". Cohen (2010), Clifford (1994) and Safran (1991) believe, however, that all displaced populations inevitably display diasporic dimensions that characterise their cultural practices in relation to their dislocation from their homelands. In addition, Clifford (1994) explains that diasporic groups are not only associated with crossing nation-state borders, but can also be internally displaced as a consequence of internal conflict, social oppression or harsh economic circumstances. The survival instinct of people displaced from one geographical

space to another, whether it involves dislocation beyond political borders or not, is often expressed in nostalgia and an identification with shared memories. This raises the question of the negotiation and construction of new identities in the course of adapting to new environments (Cohen 2010).

Other groups of migrants may have had less traumatic experiences than those associated with the traditional 'victim diasporas', or it may be that their connection with their country of origin is less significant. Clifford (1994) claims that by placing the subjects of conventional labour migration in the latter category, including the indentured Indian, Japanese and Chinese migrant workers of the 19th century, he is not minimising the exploitation, harsh conditions and controls these groups experienced in their countries of migration. As Cohen (2010) confirms, one of the differences between such groups of migrants and the so-called classical diasporas (the Jews, Greeks, sub-Saharan Africans, Armenians and Irish) is the fact that only a small fraction of the population took the decision to migrate, they had a legal right to return and, even though the recruitment and migration processes were often brutal and unfair, it was at least legally regulated. Safran (2005), equally, suggests that the continued commitment towards a restitution of 'home' usually occurs as a result of the violence or oppression that forced the displacements of a particular group. However, he also has the merit of offering a wide definition of diaspora, expanding it to include other minority communities; he believes that the diasporic narrative, usually grounded in an 'imaginary homeland', for which the Jewish diaspora has been the core paradigmatic example, should be extended to describe the experiences of other dispersed populations which retain a continued attachment to a relatively more realistic, existing homeland. The imaginary, desired homeland is therefore not the only common characteristic on which diasporas are based, although according to Cohen (2010) and Clifford (1994), the retention of a collective memory of home, the idealisation of this homeland, and an ongoing commitment towards its restitution continue to be among the main factors that characterise diasporas as such.

It is frequently argued, however, that diaspora is losing its core meaning and has become too broad a concept. Brubaker (2005) suggests that it can no longer be used to identify any particular community because there are now few obstructions to any community identifying themselves as such. Contemporary literature indeed offers



numerous definitions of the term, each emphasising some features while eliminating others or adding new ones. This has sowed a certain amount of confusion over which migrant groups could be said to have developed a diasporic consciousness, and has incited debates about the criteria by which they can be distinguished from other migrants and transnational networks. Accordingly, this research distinguishes between transnational migration and diaspora by emphasising that the latter term indicates a more political character. It is also important to stress that although both exile and diaspora involve the displacement of people who then struggle to proclaim their identity with their original environment (Sullivan, 2001), the concept of diaspora often challenges the notions of home, borders and nation-states.

In the final analysis, there is no doubt that any definition of the concept of diaspora, as accurate as it may at first appear, will still be considered too broad by some and too narrow by others (Cohen, 2008). It appears, however, to be commonly agreed that diaspora cannot be simply a synonym for migration, although the exact meaning of the term itself continues to “provoke and intrigue” (Tölölyan, 2011). While taking these debates into account, it is necessary to clarify the basic characteristics of diaspora when using the term in a work of research, otherwise it risks losing its coherence as a conceptual category. For this reason, I use Cohen’s (2010) three fundamental markers of a diasporic community as outlined above (collective trauma as the main motivation for migration, difficulties integrating into the receiving society, and the cultivation of a ‘myth of return’ to an often idealised homeland, which assumes a political character) as the starting point from which to address one of the fundamental questions of this research: to what extent can those highly skilled and educated Algerian women who were uprooted and dispersed following the traumatic events of the 1990s be called a diaspora? The question, however, will be explored using a feminist lens. This specific focus entails an engagement with the social constructionist theories of diaspora.

In light of this debate, I would like to emphasize on the fact that this research intends to use the term diaspora in the analytical category as a heuristic device rather than a term simply used by people dispersed outside their homelands to express their engagement, or otherwise, in diasporic activities.

*Beyond ethnicity: the social constructionist critique*

Cohen suggests that a further phase in diaspora studies appeared from the mid-1990s on, influenced by the social constructionists' critiques of earlier theories. The earlier critiques of the traditional definition, despite their recognition of the proliferation of groups newly designated as diasporic and the evolution of new ways of studying them, were nevertheless criticised for holding back the full force of the concept. The social constructionists were influenced by postmodernist ideas, and most especially by feminist and black literature. Stuart Hall's work in particular had a significant impact on diaspora studies. By emphasising the importance of adjusting the academic approach to race and cultural identity, Hall (1990) contributed to overturning the traditional conception of ethnic and national boundaries that placed the first within fixed territorial limits and the second within political borders. According to Anthias (1998), it was Hall's influence that helped to open the concept of diaspora to other groups, forging the pathways followed by the constructionist critics of classical theories of diaspora and allowing the addition of class and gender as essential features. Anthias (1998) claims that Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) represented another turning point in the development of the theoretical arguments highlighting the importance of diaspora as a social condition. Gilroy charted the establishment of a diasporic consciousness amongst migrants in multicultural and multi-ethnic societies, and paved the way for other writers on transnational migration, displacement and resettlement to consider diaspora as a heuristic device to better understand the relationship of migrants to 'others', their host societies and their homeland (Anthias, 1998; Vertovec, 1996).

Social constructionists, therefore, aim to deconstruct two of the major factors delimiting and demarcating the notion of diasporas: the first is the nature of the relationship of displaced people with their homeland and the second is the ethnic/religious bonds that link dispersed communities to each other. The social constructionist view is grounded in the fact that in the post-modern world, identities have become deterritorialised, restructured, deconstructed, reconstructed and more flexible in response to displaced people's social situations (Hall, 1990; Anthias, 1998). Social constructionist theorists attempt to respond to this complexity. Even though earlier scholars of diaspora now agree to some extent with these critics, they initially expressed the fear that this

approach will empty the concept of meaning and, more importantly, of its analytical power (Cohen, 2008). Cohen (2010), however, later reconsidered the question, claiming that the end of the 20th century represented the beginning of a phase of unification for diaspora studies, one that encompassed the social constructionist critiques.

As we have seen, the increasing complexity of the idea of ‘belonging’ created by the deterritorialisation of identity is an important phenomenon in the constitution of diasporas, particularly for those groups who have been repeatedly displaced. Nevertheless, there is a wide consensus that ideas of home and a strong commitment to a homeland are both powerful discourses when defining diasporas in general, although this was more strongly asserted in the key examples cited above, particularly in the Jewish example. Thus, the phase of consolidation in diaspora studies, as Cohen (2008) explains, has been marked by an adapted re-affirmation or reconsideration of the diasporic idea, one that includes both classical elements and other common features that best describe the experiences of contemporary migrants. According to Hall’s (1990) argument, the concept of diaspora involves a new conception of identity that seeks to go beyond the essentialist debate on ethnic/racial and cultural identities. In fact, as mentioned earlier, diaspora studies have now re-focused their attention on transnationalism as a dynamic process relating to ethnic commonalities, while at the same time recognising differences and diversity such as gender and social class (Anthias, 1998).

Through looking at the experience of a selected group of Algerian women, this research interrogates the proposition that “diasporic experiences are always gendered” (Clifford, 1994, p.313). Avtar Brah (1996), Floya Anthias (1998) and Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal (2000) claim that the etymology of the word diaspora always refers to the migrant’s social condition, which is constructed from multifaceted identities informed by both their past and current circumstances, as well as to their future hopes. I know from my own experience that migration is a non-linear journey, but one which is always marked by resistance to the process of forgetting the homeland when negotiating a sense of belonging to the new host society. The importance of gender in this process has been fully acknowledged by such feminist scholars as Nira Yuval-Davis (2000), Anthias (1998) and Brah (1996) , who point out that women in general are given the role of transmitting and reproducing the community by assuring the continuity of its traditions and languages. This

“burden of ethno-cultural continuity” (Yuval-Davis, 1999 p.196) dictates women’s behaviour since they are regarded as the makers of their communities (Timmerman, 2000).

As mentioned earlier, this research is grounded in Cohen’s definitions of diaspora. Consequently, I find it important in this section to point out that Cohen (2010), in his more recent revision of his work, *Global Diasporas*, has to some extent agreed with the social constructionist critique of the classical definition, but has also advised scholars not to ‘over-do’ it. Diaspora, he asserts, might verify the popular expression of “home is where the heart is” (Cohen, 2010, p.8). In fact, social constructionists such as Brah (1996), Anthias (1998) and Soysal (2000) argue that the etymology of the word diaspora should not be limited to the description of population movements and the displacement between a homeland and another place, but should also refer to migrants’ social condition and their perception of where ‘home’ is, a perception that is, as mentioned above, constructed from multifaceted identifications relating to their past, current and even future circumstances. Brah (1996) suggests that home can be both the place where we come from and where we settle:

Where is home? On the one hand, home is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense, it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of origin. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust ... all this, as mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations. (Brah, 1996, p.192).

Brah (1996, p.180), therefore, strives to disconnect the idea of diaspora from the obsession of its necessary relationship with a physical homeland, suggesting a difference between the idea of a ‘desire for home’ and that of a ‘homing desire’. For her, if home is seen as a place of origin, it can also be interpreted as being a transnational and sometimes even fictional space. People are also increasingly beginning to identify themselves with members of other groups who have been through similar experiences, including professional networks; gay, lesbian and transgender networks; and even virtual networks that are constructed via the internet.

The work of Anthias perhaps delivers the most powerful social constructionist critique of the classical view of diaspora; it reveals the traditional view’s obvious neglect

of internal identity divisions amongst ethnic groups. Her 1998 article, 'Beyond Diaspora', emphasises the lack of attention paid by the classical discourse to the solidarities between migrants and the networks built around issues of racism, gender, employment, and inequalities and discriminations that are not necessarily ethnically based (Anthias, 1998). Most importantly, Anthias draws attention to the fact that the classical discourse is gender-blind, and asserts that this failure to recognise gender and other diverse identities within diasporas seriously hinders the concept's potential as a device that enables a fuller understanding of the complexity of migrants' experiences. The issue of gender, Anthias insists, is particularly important, given the increasing amount of research that illustrates the ways in which it shapes the experience of migration and displacement. This argument is grounded in the way people position and value themselves and their perception of how others value them within a given society and within different social categories, such as class, gender, ethnicity and/or race (Anthias, 2001). In fact, intrinsic human values and social values are continually discussed and re-evaluated in relation to people's life circumstances.

According to Anthias (2001), adaptation to new and sometimes hostile environments involves the invention of new identities that must constantly be recreated or reinvented. In the case of female migrants, whose lives have often been difficult, if not traumatic, even before the process of migration, the reconstruction of new identities involves a process of constant negotiation between vulnerability and resilience, which always relates to their experience of the migration process itself, particularly if it was unexpected or if its circumstances were dangerous or difficult. Female migrants' experiences, particularly if the migration is forced, are constantly being shifted from one stage to another, constantly in limbo. This accords with the findings of this research: according to the testimony of the respondents to its survey, not to mention my own personal experience, it appears that migrant women are engaged in a process of constantly building, negotiating and reinventing identities from multiple sources and out of multiple resources, and this often leaves them with an almost schizophrenic feeling of ambivalence. There is, however, a need to also recognise migrant women's resilience, agency and ability to cope with change; the extent to which their gender helps in asserting agency is one of the subjects this study investigates. Overall, as Anthias (2001) stresses, it is important to

recognise the significance of the gender-specific impact of the migration process on women.

In relation to this argument, there is a growing consensus around the fact that each migrant's experience is unique; it appears no longer appropriate to generalise the experiences of migrants as such as this runs the risk of neglecting people's individuality. This argument has been upheld by a plethora of scholarly sources, often taking a multidisciplinary perspective, including a psychosocial approach concerning the wellbeing of people who experience forced exile (Papadopoulos, 2002, 2006). Supported by substantive empirical research, this approach shows the importance of taking gender and other aspects of identity into account in the study of resilience and agency, and in particular the importance of holistically assessing the wellbeing of women and their ability to adapt to their new environment (Papadopoulos, 2006; Agger, 1994). Papadopoulos also indicates the importance of identifying certain groups – for example, trafficked persons (particularly women); girls and young women who have been subjected to gender-related persecution; migrants with healthcare needs such as HIV or other chronic illnesses; victims of domestic abuse; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender migrants; and female professionals and academics. The importance of such an identification is to help orient policy-makers towards the particular plight and trauma of migrants (Papadopoulos, 2006). By recognising gender and cultural differences amongst the groups under investigation, the researcher is better able to understand how each individual experiences the loss of homeland, which in turn facilitates an understanding of the development of a diasporic consciousness.

Similarly, the focal point of Soysal's (2000) critique of the earlier concepts of diaspora is the fact that the experience of migration is a dynamic process rather than a vector between receiving and home countries, or simply a melancholic desire for home, as such ideas fail to recognise the multi-connections migrants have within their new environment or their aspirations to fully practice their new citizenship. This affirms Rina Benmayor's and Andor Stoknes' (1994) argument that migration is not a linear but a dynamic process that responds to the individual's aspirations. However, while taking this into account, the main argument in this research is that, in the case of the women under investigation, their access to citizenship and citizenship rights are based to a significant

extent on the politics of gender in both their countries of origin and in their new communities. The way migration has been politicised in the Global North during the last two decades has resulted in the increased presence of a stereotypical representation of the 'other', and this representation highlights a crisis in national identity, particularly in some European countries, that questions the principles of citizenship (Tare and Freedman, 2000). In light of this, the feminist literature on nationalism, nation and gender is crucial to understanding the role of gender in the formation of the notion of citizenship, nationalities and nations. This was most clearly evident during the immediate post-colonial era (Moghadam, 1994; Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989) and has particular significance for the Algerian background to this research.

It is undeniable that newly independent countries often limit their principles of autonomy and freedom to the public sphere – a space in which women, as protectors of the private sphere, are not permitted (Moghadam, 1994). It could also be argued that codes of conduct controlling and dominating women in different societies are universally grounded on patriarchal institutions that define the politics of gender, even though these may differ from one society to another (Yuval-Davis, 1997) (Guemar, 2011). Yet, this policing of women is also seen in many contemporary political movements and in many sociological theories, where women tend to be allocated the role of the bearers of a 'collective identity' (Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989; Moghadam, 1994); theoretically as well as symbolically and physically, women are all too often still required to carry the burden of representation of cultural and religious values, and the traditions and symbols of their communities. Yuval-Davis (1997, 1993) has extended this view to explain that nations are undeniably considered as evident expansions of communities and families. She claims that women's main role in society was, and in some cases still is, considered in many nationalist discourses to be that of carrying out the tasks of reproduction, both of the citizen and of the nation's ideology. Yuval-Davis (1997, 1993) argues that these theories justified the exclusion of women from the public and political arena, confining them to the private sphere of reproducing the community and caring for the family. However, Valentina Moghadam (1994) shows that the politics of gender, in the context of both colonialism and post-colonialism, is constantly wavering between the dichotomy of private-public space, as in the case of Algerian, Iranian and Afghani women. Moghadam's

work relates gender to other identity struggles; she argues that it modifies and mediates religion, class, ethnicity and race.

In the context of diaspora, this feminist argument joins other social constructionist critiques which argue that the concept should avoid the essentialism of the traditional discourses based only on ethnic and cultural identities. Clifford (1994) investigates women's experiences of diaspora by questioning whether or not it reinforces or conceals gender subordination as dictated by patriarchal rules. On the one hand, female migrants often strive to maintain connections with their religious and cultural traditions, which tend to reproduce patriarchal structures. On the other hand, new roles and opportunities in the receiving countries' public spaces are potentially opened up to the diasporas. As a result, women might be confronted with dilemmas that are conducive to a positive renegotiation of gender relations while remaining attached to and empowered by their original cultures, religions and customs – although in a selective way. As an example, Heaven Crawley (2001) cites those Iranian women refugees who re-adopt traditional religious and dress protocols, perhaps to overtly exhibit an ongoing connection with their homeland. However, due to the hardships of their experiences – their identity 'loss-gain' – even these women may reject the option of returning home even if it is practicable.

Such feminist and social constructionist arguments, and the way they deconstruct and interrogate the idea and experience of diaspora, have informed the progress of this research, which has used their insights in so far as they relate to and explain the situation of highly skilled women migrants during a specific period of Algerian history. The politicised notion of 'sisterhood', of women coming together, often takes the form of solidarity in the fight against oppression and discrimination. However, as bell hooks (1986, p.127) explains, "some feminists now seem to feel that unity between women is impossible given our differences", especially as the social contexts in which women live and struggle differ widely from one society to another across the world. However, Assia Djebar (2012, 2002) recounts that, under the French occupation, Algerian women created networks of solidarity despite their differences; they had to fight two distinct enemies, the coloniser and the indigenous patriarchy, and in the process they created two distinct strategies of resistance and forms of solidarity. Later, during the Black Decade, women were faced not only with patriarchal rules but also with radical political Islam, which is



nothing less than an even more extreme form of patriarchy (Lalami, 2012). The highly skilled Algerian women who were forced into exile during this period consequently developed a sense of self-awareness that later enabled some of them to create efficient networks to help overcome their divisions and thus ease the pain of exile. This research seeks to verify the feminist and social constructionist arguments by exploring the networks and experiences of these women, in terms of both their social class and gender.

*Dialogism: the Bakhtinian feminist approach to women's re-construction of identity*

An unavoidable issue that arose during the research process and became central to the investigation is the question of how women migrants reinvent their identities in the effort to adapt to their new environment. If there is a desire among women to integrate into the new, albeit often hostile, communities they find themselves in, and to create a new sense of home, it is often mediated by a resistance to the process of forgetting the country of origin, as adaptation is not accomplished without experiencing an on-going duality between the individual's self-perception and other's perceptions of this 'self'. I have chosen to explore this question of identity through a Bakhtinian dialogical approach (Pearce, 1994; Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008).

The term 'dialogism' is used to denote that every instance of discourse acknowledges that it is defined by its relationship to other instances – to a past to which it responds and a future which it anticipates; it is a constant process that engages with and remains informed by other voices, seeking to either alter or inform them. Dialogical statements are always involved in an intense relationship with the other's words; they are always addressed to a listener and anticipate a response, aware of the other's consciousness. Dialogism, therefore, is not simply a description of different perspectives on the same world, but involves the sharing of completely opposite views and perspectives, affirming plurality and diversity. Hajdukowski-Ahmed (2008) cites Mikhail Bakhtin's statement that there are always varied standpoints from which to see and respond to the external world. Hence, Bakhtinians view identity-construction as a dialogical process: it cannot be unified in a particular view of the world but is formed through language in the course of social interaction.

Although Bakhtin did not specifically address gender, Bakhtinian feminists have used his approach to define gender identity as socially fashioned through language by means of a dialogical process (Pearce, 1994) (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008). This theory is in broad agreement with those of black, post-colonial and Latina feminists, as well as scholars in refugee studies, who seek to promote an understanding of the importance of agency when working with women from diverse backgrounds (Cole *et al.*, 1992; Mohanty, 2003; Forbes-Martin, 2004; Hajdukowski-Ahmed *et al.*, 2008). In this regard, the Bakhtinian feminist approach enables a better understanding of both the specificity and complexity of the identity transformations women experience as a result of forced migration and relocation. Most importantly for this study, it has enabled researchers to identify and validate ‘the power of agency’ so that even when women have suffered torture or abuse the dialogical approach helps reveal moments of resistance (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008, p.53).

Dialogism, which views the process of identity construction as continual and relational, involving questioning, reacting and repositioning oneself, seems to be particularly suitable for understanding the experiences of those highly skilled Algerian women who fled the country during the traumatic Black Decade. What it helps to reveal is, in effect, the process of identity-fragmentation and reformulation that occur during the journey into exile – that is, losing an identity and gaining a new one, or what has been termed the ‘de-selving’ and ‘re-selving’ of exiled women (see below for a fuller explanation of these terms) (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008, p.38). It also shows how a displaced group of people creates continuity out of chosen common identity markers which leads them to establish networks of solidarity, to mobilise and create a diaspora. The psychosocial scholar Renos Papadopoulos (2005) explains that the negative reactions identified with trauma are not the sole emotional response of people who experience oppression, violence and forced migration. As this research suggests, participants react differently to different stages of their journey, varying from the most negative and vulnerable responses to the most positive and resilient. Papadopoulos (2006) ‘investigates the etymology of the word ‘trauma’ and explains that ‘*titrosko*’, the original Greek word, comes from the verb ‘*teiro*’ (‘to rub’)’ (Guemar, 2011, p. 51). He argues that the different meanings of ‘*teiro*’ in Greek – ‘to rub in’, ‘rub off’ or ‘rub away’ – have dialectical

implications: depending on personal characteristics and the environment, a wounded person could have two opposite dialogical responses to their experience, either a negative one, 'rubbing in' the wound, or a positive one, 'rubbing off' or 'rubbing away' the experience, which disposes people to recover from their injury (Papadopoulos, 2006, p.26).

Papadopoulos (2006) further explains the idea of resilience, which in scientific terminology refers to the ability of any substance, depending on its initial characteristics, to retain its original state when subjected to constraints. When this definition is extended to the human being, resilience means resisting pressure without damage to one's value, skills or capabilities; the key characteristic defining human resilience is the capacity to retain one's existing character and inner strengths after facing adversity (Guemar, 2011). The women participants in this research demonstrate great aptitude in their disposition to heal, their positive reactions and their resilience. The research suggests that the meaning that people give to the suffering they experience as a result of political oppression, violence and exile depends on diverse factors that can best be addressed if their gender and cultural background, as well as the context in which they now live, are taken into consideration. Frantz Fanon's (1986) work on Algerian women's participation in the struggle to free the country from French colonial rule, for example, led him to conclude that women confronted by war, conflict or exile almost inevitably transfer the inner strength they develop through their struggles in the private sphere to the public sphere.

On the other hand, the experience of forced migration and the loss of homeland leads to a loss of a locus of identity which can enhance a person's sense of their own value as shaped by their direct environment (Papadopoulos, 2006). In the particular case of Algerians exiled following the rise of radical Islam and the terror of the 1990s, positive external valuation was lacking from within the community itself, which was divided around the question of who killed whom and who did what during the conflict, and from the countries to which they fled, where newcomers from Algeria were often regarded as potential terrorists (Cetti, 2003). Dialogism explains how such women may have constructed a new idea of home, one that is idealised or imagined, in a dialogical process where the ideal replaces the real, the abstract replaces the concrete, and henceforth defines its location and definition.

Marrousia Hajdukowski-Ahmed (2008), basing her argument on the ethnographic research she conducted with refugee women in Canada, declares that women who find themselves in a new environment frequently have to develop the capability to ensure the cultural continuity of their community and simultaneously act as agents of change for their family and for the community. In the case of Algerian women, and perhaps more generally for many other women forced into exile, the politics of gender in the new societies differ greatly from those in their countries of origin. To give an example, it has been reported that the married, highly skilled Algerian women who moved to countries where mainstream gender equality is guaranteed had to renegotiate power relationships within the couple in a way that was not necessarily in their husband's favour (Alaoui, 2010).

Following her ethnographic research with professional and activist Algerian women who left during the Black Decade for France and Canada, Myriam Hachimi Alaoui (2010) found that the loss of social status this migration involved, due to the barriers they faced in rebuilding professional careers, often led to the destabilisation of the respective married roles they had negotiated in Algeria. In some cases, these new conditions, as well as the open discourse on gender equality in the host country, often gave women the opportunity to see their spouses from alternative perspectives, even to understand them on a deeper level. Husbands who may have appeared open-minded and supportive of their wives' political activism and professional careers 'back home' can lose these qualities in exile. Indeed, the growth of women's inner strengths in order to successfully adjust to their new environment does not always favour the previous patriarchal pattern. If, in the country of origin, it is socially and customarily agreed that women can occupy public space, this will usually be limited by 'safeguards' and laws to prevent them from gaining 'too much' freedom. Once these social safeguards are no longer available, men can feel deprived and powerless, and may attempt to take back control over their wives. Alaoui (2010) reports the high number of divorces among the women she interviewed. This particular example shows that women have to constantly adjust to new kinds of familial relationships as a consequence of the new economic and community roles they have to inhabit during the process of adaptation to their new environment. This implies that identity breakdown and reformation do not progress in a linear way, but remain open to diversity and a multiplicity of roles, as well as to context and negotiation.

Dialogism helps us understand that identity transformation for women who have been separated from home, kinship and other identity markers does not only provoke trauma and a loss of self, but also the negotiation of new forms of self. As explained earlier in this literature review, Yuval-Davis (1997) shows how women's role as bearers of a community's identity means that even in the most difficult circumstances they are often obliged to act, even where this agency is imposed on them by 'duty'. Therefore, it is important to underline the need to understand every woman's experience(s) and how these experiences affect their aptitude to develop agency and survival mechanisms. Cohen (2012) explains that even when people are able to organise their journey and predict what they might find in their new environment, it often turns into an unknown and uncertain situation that calls for painful readjustment, and this inevitably involves a process of 'de-selving' and attempts at 're-selving'.

Based on the work of Papadopoulos (2006) cited above, I argue that in situations of conflict and war, the loss of a sense of home remains the main reason for trauma among people who are obliged to flee, whether they seek asylum (international protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention) or take other routes. Here 'home' becomes the metaphor that not only describes a physical space but also represents the continuity of the individual's relationship with the outside world. In this sense, it has physical, social, cultural, historical, linguistic, psychological and religious meanings (Papadopoulos, 2006). It is also the root of family life with all its positive and negative memories. The particular circumstances of the journey and arrival make professional women realise that they have also lost their social status, along with their personal belongings, immediate and/or extended family and language. The guilt of having left behind family members in danger and a homeland in flames further contributes to the trauma.

#### *The concepts of 'de-selving' and 're-selving'*

According to Hajdukowski-Ahmed (2008), when uprooted from their original homes, displaced people lose a part of their original selves. However, when combined with the position of vulnerability during the migration process due to their gender, not to mention the gender-related violence and harsh patriarchal rules many have previously been subject to in certain societies, women's experience of migration is often far removed from that of

their male counterparts. The psychological impact of a woman's experience is so intense that Hajdukowski-Ahmed presents this as a process of 'de-selving'.

According to Hajdukowski-Ahmed (2008, p.37), the key point is that de-selving "does not mean the loss of identity and culture, but rather the gradual erosion of agency". The implications are psychological, social, economic and political. Not only does it mean that a woman must re-invent herself and learn to inhabit an identity as the 'other' in the new society, but the psychological trauma that she encountered when she left her wider family and community can cause her to lose her sense of herself – she is de-selved. It appears, then, that the de-selving process actually begins when a woman is oppressed or abused and continues when she flees the country; indeed, it continues up to the point when she is given the right to fully participate in normal day-to-day life in her new environment. However, many migrant women are denied administrative status in the receiving country, making the de-selving process even more complex. The whole process requires a continuing response to change, demanding ever-more energy and internal resources to deal with intense dialogical experiences, which can involve violent and racist forms of labeling. In fact, as Martin-Forbes (2004) points out, the discrimination and racism women face in their new countries can have a traumatic effect. Besides which, Pamela Sugiman (2008) believes that many migrant women arrive with little awareness of racism and do not consider themselves as 'racialised' beings.

In terms of this research, the testimonies of individuals about their experiences of the process of de-selving and re-selving constitute a vital narrative resource for researchers investigating the impact of the Algerian Black Decade on those highly skilled women who fled the country and now live abroad. For this purpose, a diaspora seems to be the most appropriate space in which such narratives can be shared, a space that allows the ventilation of resentments in order to find the ability to forgive and to heal. This again involves a dialogical process. This research aims to highlight the need for the creation of such a space, one in which the identity, selfhood and agency of Algerian women can be constantly reshaped and renegotiated, driven as it is by the need to face the challenges that arise from the experience of dislocation, including the need to develop new social ties in a new environment.

Exiled women often develop their own discourses, rejecting the identities that are forced on them in the receiving country and generating their own 're-selving narratives'. Women who are determined to re-selve are usually those resolved to take the reins of their lives into their own hands. According to Hajdukowski-Ahmed (2008, p.49), as part of this process, they face a continuous dialogical struggle between victimisation and resistance, between being a helpless victim and an empowered survivor, between the 'here' of their present and the 'there' of their past, between what they say and what they are silent about, and between perceiving a situation as a challenge or as an opportunity. If granted administrative status, and given the chance to gain or resume their professional career, women can regain some kind of agency, on the condition that they are able to avoid what Hajdukowski-Ahmed (2008, p.39) terms 'pseudo-re-selving', which may arise when they attempt to rebuild their new identity under extremely "asymmetrical power relationships" within the new society. There is little doubt that the Algerian women under investigation in this research aspire to free themselves from the old patriarchal rules as soon as they become more aware of the socially constructed values of their new society and of the commonly accepted ideas of gender equality and freedom. Some women I met during the course of this study seized the opportunities offered them in order to affirm themselves, whether as professional women or as political activists, or simply as 'themselves'. In fact, when the new environment permits, it "opens up a space for developing agency" from which "transforming opportunities [can] emerge" (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008, p.41).

However, evidence of the re-selving of exiled Algerian women, both in the literature and in research conducted on Algerian migrants, is quite limited. In his famous work, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, Abdelmalek Sayad (2007) points to the fact that it is important to research the historical conditions of being an emigrant from Algeria and being viewed as an immigrant in France in order to better understand the sadness attached to what is known in Algeria as '*elghorba*', which derives from '*ghrib*' (the Arabic word for alien), the most common Algerian term used to describe migration and exile. Sayad's work, originally titled *The Double Absence*, has been considered so important that it is now applied to an understanding of the social conditions of migrants in general. Drawing from this work, Emmanuel Saada (2000) points out that the success of what is called the process of re-selving, the creation of a new home in which women feel settled, as described by

Brah (1996), always depends on the immigration and citizenship policies of the receiving countries, which are invariably gendered. Thus, there is far more research into and evidence of the de-selving impact of being a migrant woman than the process of re-selving, particularly as it is clear that many migrant women find themselves in a liminal state when they lack the administrative status that would allow them to exert citizenship rights. This equally inhibits professional, highly skilled women from starting a new academic or professional life, and can in turn undermine the sense of agency of even the most determined and 'active' among them.

### **Organisation of the thesis**

This thesis comprises seven chapters. Chapter One presents the framework used to conceptualise diaspora and gives an outline of the questions the research seeks to address. It examines different transnational migration patterns before discussing some of the current definitions of diaspora, which appear to have proliferated to the extent that the term now appears to describe any group of migrants. Diaspora scholars and theorists, however, have drawn attention to the necessity to return to the original definition of diaspora as a social condition in order to better understand migrants' experience of engagement in their new societies as well as in their countries of birth. Nevertheless, social constructionists criticise the original definition, arguing that it focuses only on ethnicity and nationality, overlooking the role of gender, class and other identity markers in the making of a diaspora and the development of a diasporic consciousness. The chapter explains how the argument relates to this research, which is concerned with the experience of those highly skilled Algerian women who fled during the country's Black Decade of the 1990s. The question of women migrants reinventing their identities in the effort to adapt to their new environment has unavoidably arisen as a central issue. If there is a desire to integrate into new, albeit often hostile, host communities and to create a new sense of 'home', it is often mediated by a resistance to the process of forgetting the country of origin, as adaptation is not accomplished without experiencing an on-going duality between the individual's self-perception and others' perceptions of this 'self'. I have chosen to explore this question of identity through a Bakhtinian dialogical approach.



Chapter Two explains the feminist standpoint of the methodology: for instance, it discusses the ontology and epistemology that influenced the design and conduct of the research. Feminist research allows for the use of innovative methods of data collection, and therefore the research employed a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. The chapter also includes a statement about myself as the researcher and my positioning within the research, and discusses how this affected the collection and analysis of the data, and the ethical issues involved. As it is difficult to assume nowadays that people migrate only to those countries with which they have some kind of connection, I needed to locate a dispersed group of women who left Algeria following the rise in violence in the 1990s, and the RDS method proved key to realising this ambition. Due to technical issues, I was only able to use RDS to recruit the participants as it was not possible to use the software to analyse the network. To complement my own knowledge of the situation in Algeria at the time, I conducted in-depth interviews with participants, one of which proved particularly arresting in its depth and complexity, and consequently it became the main case-study used to illustrate the research findings. I also comment on the expressions of interest and solidarity I received from the many women I met during the course of my fieldwork. Finally, however, the chapter emphasises that the research is not concerned with generalising its findings to encompass the Algerian diaspora per se, but is intended to provide an interpretation of the data collected from this very specific set of migrants from Algeria, as will be seen in the following chapters.

The first part of Chapter Three addresses the historical conditions in which Algeria's Black Decade (otherwise known as the 'Dirty War' or '*la sale guerre*') occurred. It explains how the post-colonial socialist regime of the FLN (National Liberation Front) imposed the doctrine of 'one land, one language and one religion' on Algeria, ignoring the legitimacy of the diverse national movements that had contributed to the liberation of the country from French colonial rule. The fall of the Soviet Union and the discrediting of Soviet communism in the 1990s had major implications for the FLN, particularly as it took place at the same time as the collapse in the price of oil, which had a severe impact on the Algerian economy. The oil crisis fed into a global downturn, exposing the corruption and bad governance of many one-party states, including Algeria. The IMF (International Monetary Fund), the World Bank and the WTO (World Trade Organisation)

shifted their focus from economic failure to failures of governance and imposed the liberalisation of capital markets alongside a turn to electoral democracy as a condition for financial aid. The chapter shows how this formed the soil in which the radical Islamist movement flourished. The second part of the chapter goes on to look at the impact on Algerian women.

Chapters Four and Five comprise one woman's (Lamia's) narrative of surviving the Black Decade which comprises the core case study of this thesis. It represents an important contribution to the current analysis by offering a very immediate way of understanding the impact of terror on women's lives, as well as their struggles to construct new lives when forced to take the route of exile, and the way they realise their agency in these struggles. This narrative is of course a unique testimony, but it is one that can be generalised to better understand the nature of the violence committed by both the security forces and the Islamist armed forces; it also has the particular merit of highlighting the importance of justice and truth in achieving forgiveness, healing and reconciliation between Algerians. This raises questions of 'imagining home' and the development of a diasporic consciousness that is fashioned by gender and other social constructs. Trauma survivors often try to fit their stories into a framework and place themselves within it in a way that makes sense of their experiences, but "what happens when no sense can be made?" (Andrews, 2010, p.153). Arguably, this was the case with the confused horror of the Black Decade. As a consequence, Lamia relates her narrative in a nonlinear and non-chronological manner; in order to convey her experience faithfully, the two chapters for the most part reproduce her narrative flow, at the same time as deconstructing her story using the theoretical and conceptual tools outlined in Chapter One to reveal insights that are fundamental to this research. Lamia is also one of the few participants who lived and worked in those very dangerous areas of Algeria at the time. Her narrative went deeply into talking about what other women had often briefly mentioned: random terrorist attacks and their ongoing traumatic effects on the wider Algerian population. "Genocide against intellectuals" was also mentioned by academics and other NGOs to describe the tragedy of the Black Decade, such as Karima Bennoun (2013). I found great materials to challenge this in Lamia's narrative who was neither a francophone, a communist or described herself as an intellectual.

The purpose of Chapter Six is to present and analyse the survey data, both in support of, and in complement to the core case study, Lamia's narrative, with evidence from both the online survey and other in-depth interviews. The analysis is broken down into four sections, with the first exploring key issues regarding the circumstances under which the participants were forced to leave Algeria and revealing the international community's reaction to the situation in Algeria in the 1990s, particularly as regards the persecution and assassination of intellectuals and members of the professional class. The second, meanwhile, investigates the participants' life experience(s) outside Algeria and the professional and cultural networks they belong to in the receiving country and elsewhere; it explores their use of online resources and the role these play in enabling them to maintain their relationship with Algeria and engage in political discussions over the position of women's rights in the country. The third section analyses the barriers participants believe they would face if they were to return to live in Algeria, and the final section raises key issues relating to the way the participants attempt to negotiate new identities in their host countries and their perceptions of belonging to a female Algerian diaspora.

Chapter Seven presents the conclusions drawn from the research. It reflects on the importance of the use of the concept of diaspora as a heuristic tool to explore the social interactions of the participants with other Algerian women migrants, their new environment and their country of origin. Drawing from the analysis of the core case study of Lamia (Chapters Five and Six), other participants' accounts, the survey findings and other observations, it reveals the complexity of women's 'identity reconstruction' in exile, as well as their notion of belonging to the transnational space in which they now live. It discusses the resilience, agency and sense of diasporic consciousness found amongst the participants, but notes that this requires understanding and nurturing, and it suggests the need for further research into how the networks revealed by this study could be consolidated in order to create a solidarity that currently appears to be lacking amongst Algerians living abroad. It also highlights the coercion behind the decision of women to leave their countries during war and times of conflict. Such coercion of course relates to the experience of terror and generalised and/or targeted violence, but it cannot be disassociated from the gender-based violence, persecution and discrimination that affects

women on a daily basis, factors which compelled the majority of women in this study to flee. The chapter reveals that, despite this fact, the international instruments of protection are often gender-blind. Finally, it presents some recommendations to policy-makers and organisations which could help consolidate the mechanisms of solidarity between highly qualified women migrants from Algeria such as those who participated in this research.

## **Chapter Two: Framework and Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The following chapter outlines the overarching theoretical feminist framework in which the research methodology is placed, as well as the methods employed. It explains the reason behind the use of Random Driven Sampling (RDS) to locate a network of geographically dispersed highly skilled Algerian women who share the same basic characteristic of having left their homeland during a specific period in its history – the Black Decade and its immediate aftermath. In order to determine whether or not this network acts as a diaspora (as defined in the literature review in Chapter One), it was necessary to observe the participants' social practices. Arguably, an examination of the nature of these women's lives in exile, and how they construct new identities in their new societies whilst maintaining (or not) continuity with their previous ones, will help advance our understanding of adaptation and shed light on how achieving success in new and unfamiliar environments relates to its apparent antithesis, the 'myth of return', as well as to such factors as the mobilisation of solidarity. In order to investigate this question more closely, I interviewed 15 participants, recruited through the RDS method using an ethnographic approach. Among these interviewees, the narrative of one woman, Lamia, stood out; it appeared to articulate most coherently the experience of many women who lived through Algeria's internal conflict and the horror of the Black Decade. Lamia was driven to undertake her journey to seek asylum as much by the harsh patriarchal restrictions and the discrimination and harassment she experienced in Algeria at that time, which she clearly describes as socially embedded, as by the daily fear of indiscriminate terror which left her with traumatic memories of violence. Nevertheless, she expressed the need to achieve some kind of forgiveness and resolution in order to continue with her day-to-day life in the UK. Given how fully it appears to cover the key themes that emerged from the rest of the data (see the data analysis in Chapter Six), I chose to make her narrative the core case study in this research.

## **Feminist epistemology and research methods**

I was committed to approaching my research using a feminist framework. It would be dishonest to say that I was neutral: my own position and political beliefs have played a major role in conducting the research data analysis. My initial concern when designing this research was to offer evidence of the high numbers of highly skilled, professional women who fled Algeria during the Black Decade – a female brain drain that was ignored and even denied by the Algerian rulers. Based on my observations and experience, there appeared to be a surprising lack of solidarity and cohesion amongst these women, who were now living abroad. Nevertheless, I was motivated to explore whether the networks these women engage in act, or could act, as agents of women's development in both home and receiving countries, and the political and policy implications of such activities. In order for this to be the case, the women involved in these networks need to be motivated by a sense of solidarity and political mobilisation; above all, they need to display a diasporic consciousness. This raised questions concerning the women's wellbeing and adaptation to their new environments, whether they nurtured the idea of returning home, and their contribution to the debate around national reconciliation and how to rebuild society in a post-conflict situation. The literature on transnationalism and diaspora contends that the dream of return is nearly always just that, a dream, and it rarely occurs in practice (see Chapter One). Nevertheless, as this 'myth of return' still retains a strong emotional attraction and generates a sense of nostalgia among many Algerian migrants, I was motivated to discover whether, and how, these women mobilise and engage with each other as a group in order to create positive changes both for themselves in their new environments and for their peers in Algeria. This motivation is essentially what gives this research its feminist underpinning. Consequently, the methodology is informed by the body of feminist theoretical literature on research into women's narratives, lives and experiences (Maynard and Purvis, 1994; Ramazanoglu, 1992; Hemmings, 2011; Hesse-Biber, 2013).

I was also inspired, throughout the research process, by the work of Chela Sandoval (2000), and in particular by her claim that women of colour, especially migrant women, possess the aptitude to create social movements that unite across cultural differences. She believes that such a movement could become a vanguard for a progressive

identity politics, with the potential to challenge the deep inequalities created by the global market. As the new communications technologies bring people closer to each other, it has become increasingly important to learn the skills to both acknowledge the 'self' and negotiate a new 'self', adapting to new environments by transcending differences. Sandoval demonstrates that women of colour and migrant women have successfully developed these skills through their experiences of oppression, as well as during their migration journeys and adaptation to new environments. She believes that the time will come when women who have had to develop the capacity to shift from one identity to another will be able to offer these skills to a world that is beginning to realise the need to confront cultural differences by transforming and creating a new sense of the 'self'.

#### *Methodology of the oppressed*

The central feature of feminist research, as opposed to more traditional forms, is therefore its dialogical dimension; it focuses not only on the production of new knowledge but also on the way the research itself can make positive social changes for women (Ollivier and Trembley, 2000). Feminist epistemology is characterised by its standpoint rather than by any specific methodology, thus allowing for the introduction of innovative methods of collecting and analysing data (Ramazanoglu, 1992). Building on this perspective, Judith Cook and Mary Margaret Fonow (1991) help identify at least five grounds for a feminist epistemology: first, feminist research challenges the notion of 'objectivity'; second, it considers all aspects of social life from the standpoint of gender and its implications for the research; third, the design of the research method and the analysis of the data is undertaken with the view that the outcome of the research will be feminist 'consciousness-raising'; fourth, it shows a commitment to its ethical implications; and, finally, its results focus on challenging patriarchal culture and institutions.

Although there is no proper definition of what feminism is nowadays, conventional definitions often state that the term 'woman' is, in itself, a necessary and valid category, since all women – by virtue of their gender – share the same set of experiences (Maynar and Purvis, 1994). It is further argued that these similar experiences are not only based on women's common biological traits, but also on the social and political oppression they suffer, making 'woman' a socially and politically constructed category (Ramazanoglu,

1992). Critics of this position, however, argue that although the category 'woman' is treated, particularly in feminist academic writing, as though it encompassed a universal female experience, it has in the past only reflected the experiences and analyses of white, middle-class, heterosexual, First World women (Sandoval, 2000). Furthermore, saying that all women experience social and political oppression does not mean that all women share the same experiences of oppression (Hemmings, 2011). According to Claire Hemmings (2011), feminist theory has since progressed to a better understanding of women's differences:

We have moved from a time when we knew no better, a time when we thought 'woman' could be the subject and object of liberation, to a more knowing time in which we attend to the complexity of local and transnational formations of gender and its intersections with other vectors of power. (Hemmings, 2011, p.34)

As a secular Muslim woman and feminist of colour, I believe that what feminist researchers and activists have achieved worldwide to date in overcoming gender stereotypes and improving women's human rights should not be taken for granted (Hesse-Biber, 2013). According to this research, violence that is perpetrated against women simply because they are women is still a major concern, at least in contemporary Algerian society (Lloyd 2006).

At this point I would like to position myself within the current debate on the necessity to recognise various forms of feminism. It is argued that western feminists have attempted to liberate Muslim women without taking into consideration those 'Islamic' feminists who struggle against fundamentalist interpretations of the *Quran* and *sharia* law on a daily basis (Badran, 2009) as they consider that such interpretations have been corrupted by the dominance of patriarchal institutions in Muslim societies. While this may be true, it is necessary to bear in mind that activist Islamic feminists, as opposed to secular feminists in the Muslim world, consider the existence of God and the authority of the *Quran* as beyond question, and argue that the struggle for equality should be limited by this sacred ontology. Without reverting to a post-colonial and orientalist discourse on Muslim women, I would question whether defending the rights of women in a social context framed by rigid religious beliefs can be considered feminism. For example, Naima



Salhi, an Islamic feminist and leader of the PEP or Parti de l'Équité et de la Proclamation (Party for Fairness and Proclamation), and an elected member of the Algerian parliament, declared in 2014: "Who am I to oppose what God dictates as right? God has allowed man to have several wives because he knows that man needs more wives to purify society." This research, which took place in an Algerian context, points to the danger that this sort of Islamic 'feminism' only reflects the experience of certain, usually middle-class Muslim women, and thus has the potential to lead to the same errors as those it attributes to western feminism.

Feminist research in general should be conducted by and for women, and has always been related to women's struggles against oppression and violence against women. I argue that feminist research should also aim to enhance women's wellbeing and happiness in the society where they have chosen to live. As Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (2013) shows, feminist values and beliefs, as well as critiques of the positivist concepts and methodologies that have previously overlooked gender, are the foundation of any research framed by feminist theories. Feminist research focuses on the meanings that women give to their lives and the world around them; this is particularly important to bear in mind when choosing participants and analysing the data collected during fieldwork. Feminist research, moreover, is characterised by its interdisciplinary nature and this gives it the freedom to use different methods of interpreting data, methods that must be constantly re-defined in light of the researcher's concern to provide solutions to the problems posed by the main questions. This has meant that I have been able to explore different ideas and choose the tools that will best help me to answer my initial questions on whether, and how, the group of women I have been investigating create transnational networks, mobilise themselves collectively and thus develop a diasporic consciousness. Overall, the main argument of feminist researchers is that the experience of women is ontologically fractured and complex as they do not all share one unique and substantial experience during their life journey.

There is an equal concern that universalising analyses risk presenting women's oppression as the sole definition of womanhood. According to such a viewpoint, migrant women are generally deemed to lack power or agency. This is particularly the case with women who migrate from South to North, or who come from the so-called 'patriarchal

belt', the region described in Chapter Three (Caldwell, 1982) – as do the subjects of this research. By contrast, drawing on the work of Sue Wise and Liz Stanley (1983), this investigation is based on the premise that oppression should be seen as an extremely complex process, but one in which women are not totally powerless; they often use their strength and internal resources to resist injustice and inequality. Feminist refugee scholars have shifted the discourse from “traumatised and needy women” to women who are also “resilient and resourceful” (Loughry, 2008, p.167). This literature, however, is often ignored, and the discourse on exiled women as traumatised, needy and lacking agency is often the predominant one, particularly when it comes to informing international humanitarian programmes. Maryanne Loughry (2008, p.169) argues that although the literature exists, the resilience narrative is not predominant because research is conducted by scholars who come from a “variety of areas and academic disciplines that often do not communicate easily with each other”.

Scientific knowledge is traditionally defined by the fact that evidence must be both truthful and credible. Objectivity, therefore, remains the core tenet of the dominant scientific model, which is “mainly based upon the empiricist approach known as ‘positivism’” (Bryman, 1988; Phillips, 1977). However, this epistemology depends on the position of the social scientist within the research itself and within the group under investigation. The positivists believe that there is a ‘reality’ out there that the investigator has to discover by developing techniques and statistical instruments that will gradually uncover it. The concept of objectivity is itself grounded on two principal criteria: first, any knowledge claim must also be proven by others in the field, using established and observable facts; secondly, a social scientist’s values, emotions and political beliefs should not influence the knowledge claims he/she makes. In other words, to ensure objectivity when testing a hypothesis, the researcher must systematically follow a common method in order to exclude bias and ensure the neutrality of the research process and data analysis.

However, it is well established that there is no such thing as neutrality in life. So, in contrast to the objectivist and positivist arguments, feminist researchers encourage the development of a wide range of innovative methodological approaches, such as personal observation, discussions with individuals, and attending gatherings and other unplanned

events – in a word, taking an ‘emic approach’.<sup>4</sup> For example, feminist researchers do not necessarily encourage the use of coding to break down data into different sections and themes (Hesser-Biber, 2013). The reason is that if the researcher is required to fit the data into given themes it inhibits the emergence of valuable questions that were not foreseen in the initial theoretical outline of the research. This research has proven the value of this argument, particularly as regards the interview with Lamia, whose case study is discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

This approach is not exclusively feminist and “there are other intellectual trends in social sciences that have stimulated this interest” such as those promoted by the social constructionists and post-modernists (Hesser-Biber, 2013). Their work has helped reveal the white, male bias of many of the dominant scientific explanations of social life, proposing instead that human behaviour is socially constructed and that reality is fashioned in interaction (Campbell, 1994; Harding, 1993). This bias indicates that political ideology has indeed influenced research findings, despite the claims to objectivity. In fact, there is some evidence to suggest that the hypothesis-testing method is not and cannot be ‘value-free’, and so cannot be ‘objective’ in the strict empirical sense. Several philosophers of science – such as Thomas Kuhn (1977) and Peter Winch (2007) – have also argued that observation is always mediated by a prior understanding of how the world interconnects. The formulation of any research question, as well as the process of research itself, including the method of empirical observation, takes place within an overall theoretical framework. It is not possible for it to be otherwise, because this is what gives meanings to the process:

We do not deploy seeing in the activities of observation with a mind purged of all its contents; just the opposite is true, we need to know what sort of thing we are looking for before we can find anything to which we could give a name. We come, in fact, to the activities of observation with minds crammed full of ideas. (Steedman, 1992, p.54)

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<sup>4</sup> The ‘emic approach’ investigates how people think and perceive the world, and their rules of behaviour, as opposed to the ‘etic (scientist-oriented) approach’, which shifts the focus from local observations and interpretations to the observations of the ‘impartial’ anthropologist.

Which particular models for understanding and interpreting data are dominant at any given time is determined by what theories are available and, crucially, which of these theories is preferred above others. In this sense, the process of empirical observation cannot be neutral as it is inevitably affected by the researcher's theoretical choices and personal commitments, which in turn are influenced by the commitments of the wider scientific community in which they are situated. Political ideas may be an important factor in determining which theories are preferred in the scientific community, and may play a role in shaping the research process (Ramazanoglu, 1992; Herman, 1992).

Feminist theorists have been able to identify the andro-centrism of some scientific knowledge production by means of a thorough critique of the dualisms inherent to the development of western capitalism (Maynard, 1994; Ramazanoglu, 1992). The specific dualisms held up to scrutiny are those that assume that objectivity is separable from and superior to subjectivity, in the same way as the mind has been opposed to the body, reason to emotion and male to female, with men identified with reason and women with emotions (Pedwell, 2007). From an early age, girls are socialised to be dependent, empathic, receptive and responsive to emotions in others, while boys are socialised to be independent, instrumental, controlling and unemotional in their interactions (Hess-Biber, 2013). Men are encouraged from childhood to concern themselves with issues of 'fact', empty of emotion – a norm that is valued above all else in scientific research, while women are encouraged to concern themselves with emotions and 'morals', skills that are seen as less important and often considered unsuitable for the conduct of scientific research (Hess-Biber, 2013).

It is important to note, however, that emotions can provide a valuable source of knowledge. The analysis of emotional response affecting the researcher during both fieldwork and data analysis often generates important insights into the dynamics of the group under investigation (Kleinman and Copp, 1993; Kirkwood, 1993). Whether these emotions are acknowledged and analysed or not, all researchers are affected by them at some time in the course of their studies. Historically, the notion of empiricist objectivity, so fundamental to the positivist approach, has been highly influential in the development of ideas in the field of the social sciences. However, this approach has a tendency to overlook important questions relating to the role of values, emotions and politics as they

affect researchers in the course of their work. How this discussion on emotional response and political beliefs relates to this research is discussed below in the section on my identity and position within the research.

### *The role of ontology in questions of epistemology*

Any discussion of epistemology inevitably involves ontological issues; that is, questions concerning the definition of ‘truth’, how to find it and how can it be generalised. Discussing what kinds of knowledge are possible, and how these knowledge claims can be validated, implies holding a view on what there is that can be known – the ‘material’ we are trying to gain knowledge about (Bryman, 2001). The complex issues of epistemology and ontology are currently contested ground within the social sciences. Positivist epistemology entails an ontology whereby reality comprises a set of objective facts – truths that exist independently of theoretical or political beliefs. This research, however, as seen in the literature review in Chapter One, is based on the understanding that, as individuals, we engage in social activities and thus our identities are always re-negotiated within a socially constructed life; social and material interactions influence the way we identify ourselves and how we understand the world as it evolves around us. For example, in considering gender issues or questions of class, ethnicity or age, it can be seen that we are all gendered, we all have an age and an ethnicity, and belong to a social class (Hesse-Biber, 2013). As Hesse-Biber shows, we cannot side-step these facts and simply be a ‘neutral’ researcher.

As feminist and constructionist literature has argued (see Chapter One), research that makes a commitment to strong reflexivity in the research process and thus explicitly addresses its own social situation, including the political interests, power relationships and imbalances which impact upon the researcher and the researched, yields a form of knowledge which is in fact more valid and more rigorous. Furthermore, just as the social scientist cannot become a neutral observer for the purposes of research, neither can the social issues that are the focus of investigation be regarded as politically neutral (Bryman, 2001). The implication is that truth in social sciences is discovered or created by a phenomenological study of lived experiences. As the research process inevitably bears the imprint of the researcher’s personal identity and political commitments, these factors

should be acknowledged and clearly situated in the focus of the investigation that is based on a relativist ontology. This raises the questions of subjectivity versus objectivity. This thesis, therefore, is based on the conclusion that material reality itself is a political and social matter, and it is not possible to obtain a-political knowledge of it. The following section explains my position within the research process, including during the stage of data collection and analysis.

### **My identity and positioning within the research**

It is necessary to explain my impact upon my research, as well as how I feel the research has affected me. I came to social sciences later in life, as a mature student, after accumulating a fair amount of life and work experience: my work in Algeria, for example, was in the very male-dominated field of researching methods for non-destructive testing. I studied electronics at Algiers University (USTHB) and worked for 17 years in the field of non-destructive testing for a research centre related to the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. In March 2001, I was elected to the National Commission of Women's Rights in the Workplace with the main Algerian trade union, the UGTA (General Union of Algerian Workers) and to the Federation of High Education and Scientific Research in June of the same year. However, I was forced into exile, following a traumatic attack on my family home, and this experience subsequently shaped my desire to explore other Algerian women's similar experiences. The fact that I was new to studying in the UK at a doctoral level and also new to the field has meant that I had to engage in an intensive process of learning the essentials of social science theory, practice and research design.

I would describe myself as an Algerian woman of Berber origin, a left-wing feminist who, although nurtured in a Muslim culture, believes in the principles of political secularism. My political views are therefore an integral part of this research (Kleinman and Copp, 1993; Kirkwood, 1993).

#### *The Arab Spring, women's online discourse and the birth of a research project*

My doctoral research project began in October 2010 in Swansea University after I had been living in the UK for nearly eight years. I was living in South Wales due to the Home

Office dispersal policy, which affects anyone claiming political asylum in the UK since 1999. October 2010 was also the year I graduated from Swansea with an MSc on Population Movement and Policy, with a particular focus on mental-health provision for refugee women in Wales and the way forced displacement affects women's well-being and mental health.

My first contact on Facebook with some of the women who later agreed to act as the 'seeds' for the RDS research method (explained more fully in the following section) occurred during the second week of December 2010, just a few days before a 26-year-old Tunisian man set himself on fire, triggering what is now known as the Arab Spring. Lina Benmheni, a young Tunisian female blogger, broadcast pictures of the self-immolation on social media, mainly on Facebook and Twitter. They went viral. Meanwhile riots started in Bab El Oued, the same area of Algiers where a protest of 20,000 people was bloodily repressed in October 1988 (see Chapter Three). Memories from the Black Decade were revived, raising concerns that Algeria was entering another era of conflict.

Women on face book, expressed a need of sharing with their social networking Tunisians and Egyptians friends, the bloody Algerian experience of the black decade. In between Algerian women existed regrets not to have formed a diasporic space that could be mobilized to present evidence for the Algerian experience and the reality of the collective trauma amongst those survivors of the Black Decade. Although men also contributed to this online discussions, women created platforms, blogs and facebook groups to share concerns and opinions in order to understand why Algerians abroad never keep solidarity networks and mobilization around issues affecting their country of origin.

This time, however, the protest followed the Algerian government's decision to raise the prices of basic foodstuffs. I observed that the online discourse revealed the active participation of Algerian women living abroad and their interaction with women still resident in Algeria as they discussed ways of avoiding another conflict. In this way, they were creating a diasporic online space in which they could express dissent against the Algerian regime. Their online conversations raised the question of how to create a diaspora, by which they meant a network of solidarity linking Algerian women living abroad with each other and with women living in Algeria. It was through my participation

in this online discourse that I met many Algerian women who were actively engaged in discussing the future of Algeria, Tunisia, and later on, the whole region, sharing information and supporting Tunisian, Egyptian and Yemeni women bloggers and online activists. It was during this time that I created a Facebook page: *Algerian Women Diaspora*. After it was hacked six months later, it became a closed group, discussing issues related to Algerian women who live abroad.

Initially, as explained earlier, it had been my intention to map the Algerian women's diaspora and explore barriers to women returning to Algeria or engaging in development projects there. My PhD research was hosted by the Centre for Migration Policy Research in the Geography Department of Swansea University, and for this reason it was oriented towards women's engagement in development projects, and the word 'diaspora' was simply used to describe a migrant community group, assumed to be diasporic, that was willing to engage with its country of origin. However, this focus raised a number of fundamental questions – about the existence and nature of a diasporic consciousness amongst the group I was studying, for example – that I was unable to address within the remit of my research as it stood. Transferring my PhD to the University of East London and the Centre for Migration, Refugees and Belonging helped to reposition the research, which consequently became more focused on exploring questions of identity within a tradition of cultural studies. The fact that I relocated to a part of London known as one of the most diverse in Europe fueled my desire to explore the question of how migrant women in general create an identity that must be continually re-invented to fit the environment in which they live, in order to give my research greater depth.

The research, therefore, is focused on investigating the existence of a network of highly qualified, professional Algerian women and the barriers they face to returning to Algeria. As I was aware that return is more often a dream than a reality, I was interested to know how members of this network built solidarities, whether they were engaged in making positive changes for women's rights in Algeria or in the transfer of technology, knowledge and remittances. As I started reading for my literature review, it quickly became evident that it was necessary to define and confirm or otherwise the role of diasporas, particularly diasporas that include women with high levels of education and/or



high levels of political consciousness, in providing assistance and support to their peers in their country of origin. My personal involvement and identification with the participants in this research were both important factors. This meant that reflexivity was essential; I had to constantly be aware of how my “values, attitudes and perceptions ... influence the process of research, training, research questions, through the phase of data collection to how the data are analysed and explained theoretically” (Abbott and Wallace, 1990, p.27). However, as the research progressed, particularly during the fieldwork, I became increasingly aware of the need to deepen my understanding of the experiences of traumatised women and re-adapt my research accordingly. This process led me to collecting narratives of the journey into exile and of the traumatic memories of those women who fled the Algerian tragedy of the 1990s. This of course risked reviving my own traumatic memories of the Black Decade.

During my fieldwork and data collection, I realised the importance of the feminist framework in which I chose to conduct this research, particularly the fact that it gave me the freedom to consider different methods with which to explore these women’s traumatic stories and the resilience they displayed in building new lives in exile. The quotation cited above (Abbott and Wallace, 1990, p.27) confirms this; it made me aware that my personal involvement may have prevented me from questioning if my own experiences would affect or misrepresent the conclusions I draw from my research, and hence the crucial need to maintain a reflexive approach throughout the whole research process. Exploring innovative methods is not, of course, specific to feminist researchers alone: in the field of migration studies, Abdelamlek Sayed (2004) in particular has made a foundational contribution to the study of Algerian migrants in France. His original approach “builds upon an analytical core of remarkably rich and subtle ethnographic investigation, which support a strong historical analysis, linguistic and anthropological inquiries and political theory” (Saada, 2000).

Having been through similar experiences to those of the participants has also had important implications on the way they viewed me as a researcher. This may well have impacted the data that I gathered in both constructive and undesirable ways. The positive side of the fact that I shared some of their experiences was that it enhanced my ability to empathise with the participants. This proved to be rewarding – when the participants

recognised that I had been in similar situations, it appeared to put them more at ease during the interview. Although, the fact that I was given refugee status provoked a certain reluctance amongst those who had never claimed asylum or had not been recognised as political refugees.

#### *A research project on the move*

In December 2013, I moved from Swansea to London, and I was able to take the opportunity to attend all the academic discussions I could on the subject of Algeria, ranging from political discussions to academic seminars. These were mainly hosted by the London School of Economics (LSE) and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London. I also participated in events and gatherings organised by the Algerian community in order to observe the attendance, participation and attitudes of women. Although there were events where I wished in the main to remain anonymous, I normally introduced myself as a researcher on highly qualified Algerian women living in the diaspora. When I did this, I found that women often came up to me to say that they had responded to my survey and would be happy to contribute to other aspects of my research. Very quickly, I became known as ‘the researcher on Algerian women in exile’.

Another positive side of living in London was that it also gave me the opportunity to gain an insight into the diversity of the Algerian community. According to a report from Communities and Local Government (2009), the community in London comprises a comprehensive slice of Algerian society; it includes people of different ages, different educational levels and social backgrounds, all with varying types of immigration status. Despite the obvious lack of official figures, the same report concluded that more than half of the Algerian community living in the UK are undocumented, regardless of gender, age or level of education.

Although there is no history of migration flows between Algeria and the UK, with the exception of some highly skilled Algerians who benefited from scholarships during the 1970s and 1980s, the sample of those who fled to London during the Black Decade is perhaps one of the most informative on how that conflict was perceived by the international community (Le Sueur, 2010). It is said that the UK, and London in particular, became the destination for the majority of the Islamist politicians (and their families), who

had been elected in the first round of voting in December 1991 and then frustrated in their victory when the electoral process was cancelled. This group mainly settled in the area of London, Finsbury Park, that became known for mosques that hosted radical preachers (Le Sueur, 2010). According to James Le Sueur (2010), there was also a London-based newspaper, *Al-Hayet*, which published news about the activities of the Algerian Islamist armed forces (GIA), and which applauded the assassinations of secular intellectuals in Algeria (as mentioned in Chapter Six). These facts clearly hindered the creation of networks of solidarity between Algerians living in the UK, creating a climate of fear and suspicion within the community. Evidence from this research, particularly the interview with Lamia which forms the core case study, shows how those secular professional women who fled to London were particularly affected by this climate of suspicion prevalent in the Algerian community.

During my time in London, I also attended *iftar* (the Ramadhan breakfast) at the premises of the British-Algerian Connection (ABC), a cultural organization Chaired by an Algerian woman. This proved a great opportunity to meet members of the Algerian community from all creeds, and I had many informal discussions on how Algerians interact with each other and the barriers we face living in the UK. The tragedy of the 1990s was always at the heart of any conversation I had with fellow Algerians in both the UK and France. This helped me gain an insight into the different views they held, and made me realise that London is perhaps the best location in which to learn about how the conflict was theorised, and even maintained, from outside the country. There was, however, a reverse side to the fact of being able to talk to members of the community face to face on many different occasions: it resulted in the unfortunate and perhaps inevitable rumour (given the unhealthy atmosphere that continues to prevail in the Algerian community in the UK) that I was a ‘spy’ working for the Algerian embassy. It is not clear if this false rumour started in London or elsewhere, but it reached many of the participants. Yet, although it created a certain amount of inconvenience and unease for a short while, it did not stop the recruitment process.

## **Methodology at work**

### *Sampling the network*

To say that feminist researchers use specific methods to conduct research is incorrect: although feminist theorists initially criticised quantitative methods, particularly surveys and questionnaires, considering them to be ‘masculinist’, they later recognised the necessity to adapt whichever existing research tools would most benefit their investigation. If I was to reveal the existence of a network of Algerian highly skilled women migrants, my first challenge was to discover where exactly they had fled during and in the aftermath of the Black Decade. As there is no known methodology to study diaspora, I decided to experiment with Douglas Heckathorn’s (1997, 2011) innovative research method, Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS), which he used to study the spread of HIV within a specific group of people. I found the method particularly interesting, and after exchanging emails with Professor Heckathorn regarding the possibility of adapting his method to investigate the existence of an Algerian women’s diaspora, I resolved to use it to at least sample my network.

RDS is a method that combines ‘egocentric’ and ‘snowball’ sampling techniques based on referral from individuals to other people they are connected to (Heckathorn 1997, 2007). These individuals in turn refer more people. The first points of the network – in this case, myself and other persons I am well connected to – are called ‘seeds’. These seeds are dispersed geographically, thus resembling the original Greek meaning of the word ‘diaspora’ – the dispersion or scattering of seeds. Seeds then recruit ‘nodes’, to whom they are connected by ‘ties’, a relationship defined by specific criteria. As part of the initial network, I web-recruited six seeds (two male and four female) through Facebook, blogs and other personal networks, who were geographically dispersed in Algeria, France, Canada, the UK, Spain and the US. The seeds were selected to reflect the geographical dispersal of Algerians during the 1990s. These seeds went on to recruit nodes using a web-based process, sending a survey to at least one other person (three or more is the ideal).

This recruitment should be repeated six times or more – this is called the “six waves of recruitment”; regardless of whether or not the global size of the network is

known, mathematicians consider reaching six waves reasonably representative of a network (Heckathorn 1997). The second observation upon which RDS is based is that information gathered during the sampling process, using a questionnaire, can provide the means for making extrapolations about the underlying network structure (Bearman *et al.*, 2004). It was at this point that my input as a feminist researcher was crucial, as the sampling process is usually driven by the assumption that surveys and questionnaires are tools with which to measure objective social facts through a supposedly detached and value-free form of data collection (Maynard, 1994). To remedy this bias, I designed the survey based on a semi-structured questionnaire, which I explain later in this section.

The first page of the survey sent to the respondents gave a brief description of myself, my personal status and my professional and academic background, as well as the aims of the research. It also explained the process of recruitment and assured the participants of the strict confidentiality of the process (see appendix). The survey was accessible online for nine months, starting from spring 2013. The basic element of analysis for RDS-SN was the first 'recruitment'. Each participant recruited had to have the same characteristic of being an Algerian professional woman who had migrated from Algeria during the 1990s. While the recruitment of 'strangers' is possible and often inevitable, respondents were encouraged to recruit friends, current or former colleagues, or members of their professional associations.

The process of recruitment was relatively slow during the first three months, but gained momentum following talks at the LSE organised by the Algerian Studies Society, and other cultural and political events on Algeria in London and Paris. For example, I attended a charity dinner in London in 2013, organised to help fund a paediatric hospital in Algeria, and I gave a talk related to my research at the Algerian embassy on the 8 March 2013, which was attended by around 50 women living in the UK. By spring 2014, the survey had reached up to 180 highly skilled Algerian women across the globe, with 142 completing it – 89 women responded in French and 53 in English. The Arabic version, however, received no respondents. Arguably, Berber ethnicity and culture underlie Algerian society, and I needed to translate the survey into the Berber language. However, I do not speak Berber as it is not taught in Algeria, added to which my funds were limited and it was difficult to find official translators happy to offer their services for free.

RDS is a collection of methods that carries out two different tasks: the first is to sample a network and the second is to provide the statistical inference of the network, for which a software package RDSSAT7.5 is available. While the first task proved efficient in the sampling of a 'hard-to-reach' population, the performance of the second was far less efficient and was both time-consuming and beyond the means of this research. The survey was hosted by SurveyMonkey software; this has the key advantage of offering an option of collecting IP addresses, which helps in tracking respondents' continents and cities and ensures the confidentiality of the process. SurveyMonkey also instantly notifies me via emails when a survey is completed. This process helped to identify who recruited whom, although its accuracy remains disputable. On the last page of the survey, participants were given my contact details in case they required more information about the research.

Since the survey was essentially used to map and locate participants, and collect quantitative data, it was necessary to use an ethnographic method to find out more about their life experiences. The women who contacted me were asked if they were willing to be interviewed. As mentioned earlier, I also created a Facebook group, *Algerian Women Diaspora*, dedicated to the research. The group, which includes 259 members, six of whom are men, was set up to discuss women's concerns, particularly in Algeria, and to serve as a platform for announcements about events organised or related to Algerian women living abroad. The languages of the group are French and English, but Berber, Algerian *Derdja* and Arabic have also been used. This process helped me to spot online activists amongst French and English-speaking Algerian women, and in this way I was able to identify the 15 women with whom I conducted in-depth interviews, face to face in the UK and France, and via Skype in the US, Canada and Spain. Skype offers a video record of the interviews and the participants were all made aware of this.

Once the women agreed to being interviewed, consent forms and information sheets were sent electronically to those in the US, Spain and Canada. Participants signed consent forms and returned them before the interviews took place.

### *Survey and questionnaire design*

The survey's design was based on a semi-structured, open-ended questionnaire, available in three languages, English, French and Arabic, with 43 questions. Together with the interview questions, the questionnaire was framed to explore the definition of what constitutes a diaspora, based on the findings of the literature review conducted at the outset of the research (see Chapter One). It included the circumstances of the participant's departure from Algeria, their life abroad, whether or not they belong to an Algerian network, and whether or not they intend to return to Algeria. There was also a set of questions on participants' use of the internet to connect with each other and with Algeria, and to remain informed on Algerian affairs. The majority of the questions gave participants the option to choose more than one answer and the space to add comments.

### *Interview technique*

All interviews took the form of a conversation as this was what the participants preferred, but questions were always focused around the same three topics, as cited in the survey: the circumstances of leaving; identity reconstruction, including professional identity, in a new environment; and the desire to return to Algeria. For the majority of interviewees, however, departure was considered traumatic and this, to a great extent, turned the interviews into narratives of trauma. Having said that, the interviewees appeared to consider me as one of them, someone who has now built an academic life outside her original area of expertise and has succeeded in reaching doctoral level. I felt at every stage of the interview that each participant was bringing me into her own experience, not only of terror and trauma, but also of resilience and agency, to demonstrate that she also possessed the capacity to succeed in whichever field she chose to study or work.

During the course of my research, I was frequently asked by some of the participants and other friends and academics with whom I discussed my research: are women telling you the truth? How can you ensure that they have not embellished their accounts of their experiences in their new societies and exaggerated the discrimination, abuses and persecutions they experienced back home? My answer was always no, I cannot establish the veracity of participants' individual stories, but neither do I need to because

it is not the purpose of the research to establish exactly what happened, but rather to explore how women perceive and articulate their experiences of violence, trauma, exile and diasporic consciousness. This argument confirms Inger Agger's (1994, p.5) suggestion that there is a general mistrust of victims' stories; it is this mistrust which is exploited by dictatorships when they deny the abuse of human rights. Regarding the Algerian tragedy of the 1990s, it appears that uncovering the truth in order to give the victims justice is not yet part of the regime's political agenda, and it continues to be a divisive subject amongst Algerians abroad and in Algeria. As far as this research is concerned, it is the way they articulate and interpret their experiences of violence, exile and identity reconstruction that allowed me to conclude whether or not this particular group of women have developed a diasporic consciousness.

Laura Ellingson (1998) emphasises the connections that can be established during the interview process between participant and researcher, especially when they share similar experiences. These connections were evident in this research when participants used phrases such as "you know that, do you?", "as you know", and also very frequently, "I had to re-study for identical reasons to yours". It has been the case that I have had to invest time in building relationships before undertaking interviews, sometimes only after several contacts, usually via chat rooms on Facebook or by Skype. This process has proven helpful in building confidence between the participants and myself (Hayman *et al.*, 2011). It was inevitable that I went on to build long-lasting friendships with some of the interviewees; for example, I continue to have conversations with Feroudja since our first meeting on Facebook in 2012. Feroudja was very active in recruiting peers for the study and later, in October 2013, she also agreed to be interviewed. Since then, Feroudja and I regularly use Facebook or Skype to discuss current affairs in Algeria, particularly women's affairs. She shares her views with me following a significant event in Algeria, and tells me her attitude toward the position of the Algerian regime regarding the conflicts in Syria and the Middle East. As she is interested in my work, she sends me relevant publications, and when the research was ongoing she would enquire about its progress. This contact has of course ethical implications of which I was fully aware, and I was scrupulous in my efforts to ensure that I did not present the research findings as advocating a particular value position that betrayed Feroudja's influence.



### *Fieldwork*

Since the purpose of the research is to investigate the extent of solidarity between Algerian women migrants, it is important to mention that I made three trips to France between February 2013 and March 2014; the first two were to meet participants who agreed to be interviewed, and the third was to present a paper at a conference in Paris. Knowing that I had no scholarship/bursary and a very limited research budget, some women offered to accommodate me. For ethical reasons, I only accepted to be hosted by women I was not going to interview. My hosts displayed great interest in my research, discussing its different aspects and sharing ideas about the creation of a diaspora amongst Algerian women. The three of them were all educated to postgraduate level and were very successful in their lives in Paris. On one day, I was particularly disappointed as two participants had not turned up to the agreed interview, added to which I was losing confidence in my research following an encounter with a male academic working on Algerian migration who told me that it was not justified because the number of highly skilled women who fled in the 1990s was insignificant. When I brought this to my host's attention, she laughed off the comment, claiming it to be simply another patriarchal way of trivialising Algerian women's participation in the country's history and reminding me that this also happened after the struggle for liberation from French colonial rule, when the role of women in the struggle was ignored by the post-independence rulers and researchers alike. Her encouragement boosted my desire to continue my research.

A further important point to make here is that none of the women I knew previously from Algeria offered to be interviewed, although they expressed a keen interest in the research. Many asked for more details about the RDS method of recruitment as they were particularly interested in its mathematical aspect; however, because the survey process is anonymous, I do not know if any of my old colleagues and friends participated. Three of them, however, offered to be 'seeds' and to recruit participants.

My third trip I made to France was to attend a conference organised by *Ajaouad*, a group created by the children of intellectuals assassinated during the Black Decade whose families had fled to France. The group's aim is to ensure that the victims of the

Algerian tragedy are not forgotten. The chair, Nazim Mekbel, is the son of the journalist, Said Mekbel, who was assassinated in Algiers in 1994. Hearing about my research, he approached me to ask if I had done any work on forgiveness and healing, and if so, to present my work in the conference the group had called in commemoration of the 22 March, a date they chose as the 'Day Against Forgetting', in memory of March 1993 and 1994 when Algerians took to the streets in various cities to denounce radical Islam and terrorism. At the time Ajouad contacted me I was in the process of analysing Lamia's case study, which had brought to the surface the whole question of forgetting, healing and forgiveness. Thus, I considered it to be a good opportunity to discuss the subject and solicit feedback on my findings. The event was widely advertised in Paris and the audience mainly comprised children of well-known artists, journalists and other victims of the Black Decade. I was pleased that my introduction to my research received a good reception and very positive feedback, although the question was raised of why I only worked with highly qualified migrants, and why only women. My answer was that I needed to limit my sample in order to verify a social constructionist hypothesis and investigate if and how gender and social class play a role in shaping the creation of an Algerian diaspora. This event nurtured a desire in me to undertake research in the future on the second-generation children of those exiled following the Black Decade, and how the concept of forgiveness and forgetting is transmitted through the generations.

During my fieldwork I included my own thoughts and experiences to complement those of my fellow participants. Due to the fact that I shared this facet of my own identity with the participants, it is relevant to examine here the impact that I may have had on the research and that the research had on me. Initially, I felt that I was ideally placed as an 'insider' to explore the lives of my respondents, particularly those who have had similar experiences. The women I interviewed recounted their stories openly and often emotionally, revealing painful episodes of their experience of political unrest and social oppression, illustrating in the process the collective trauma experienced in Algeria during the Black Decade. Added to this, the decision to leave the country was frequently a painful one. Prior to each interview, I anticipated the sort of responses I would receive, causing me to fear that I would feel a corresponding emotion: sometimes in fact I was directly asked whether I had experienced similar abuse or violence. To answer honestly meant that

I had to disclose personal information with no guarantee of confidentiality; nevertheless, I took the decision to do so as it was important for my research to engage with my interviewees in a responsive and reciprocal way (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994).

Answering questions was a key part of the interview process, as the interviews were in most cases conducted in a conversational style – hence, their ‘trauma narratives’. Adrienne Chambon (2008) suggests that a conversational style is more likely to encourage women to disclose information related to their experiences. However, there was a risk attached to this: I was aware that if participants did not clarify their thoughts, it was usually because they assumed that I would already be aware of the issue. It was made clear to each participant that they could pass over any question which made them feel uncomfortable. The shortest interview lasted only 30 minutes and the longest took nearly three hours. However, these were exceptions, and the others took around an hour each. On two occasions, women preferred the interviews to be conducted via email. There were also cases where I had to interrupt the interview and return to it the following day, or a few days later. One of these respondents, who lived in a small city in Spain, was the mother of four young children and such breaks were necessary if the interview was to be conducted at all. Another interviewee told me after I had met her that she felt her story was too traumatic and preferred to write it down rather than speak face to face or via Skype.

#### *The core case study of Lamia*

In presenting the findings, I draw primarily on one case, Lamia’s trauma narrative of the Black Decade, due to its richness and ability to produce new insights; the other interviews serve as an auxiliary means of informing this research. At the end of my fieldwork, I began to consider all participants’ experience as comprising a general testimony of women in exile, albeit with the particularity of having fled the organised violence and terrorism that affected Algeria during a specific period. It goes without saying that the evocation of the generalised atmosphere of terror and violence prevalent at the time triggered traumatic memories in the participants. However, I found Lamia’s story particularly interesting as it drew my attention to the complexity of views that can be encapsulated in one woman’s experience of such horrific events.

My ability to recruit participants via Facebook, and the high number of women who responded to the survey, demonstrated the existence of a network of highly skilled Algerian women living abroad, connected to each other by a diasporic consciousness, according to the criteria defined in the theoretical literature (see Chapter One). Yet some of the survey responses and interviews with members of the same network betrayed a lack of solidarity among its members, and this contradiction led me to wish to deepen my research. Exceptionally, Lamia's narrative also described the boundaries that women encounter and the way they are "bodily, psychologically, culturally, socially and politically restricted" before and during exile (Agger, 1994, p.2). In this sense, her story goes beyond Algerian women's experience of the 1990s in that it speaks about the reality women's lives and their struggles against imposed limits, whatever their level of education. Unlike Lamia, others briefly mentioned terrorist attacks, possibly not seen as essential to their experience. Lamia decided and convinced me that it was very important to mention this as one of the main source of the trauma experienced during the Black Decade.

Lamia's narrative also relates to the concept of forgiveness, to the porous borderline between forgiveness in the private and public spheres, and to the role of gender in shaping the concept and the politics of forgiveness. This area has often been neglected by social scientists, particularly in research into situations of conflict and war. Despite the fact that other participants mentioned the implementation of amnesty legislation, stressing that the impunity it appeared to give terrorists was one of the barriers impeding their return to Algeria, Lamia alone articulated the idea that knowing the truth in order to see justice done is an essential prerequisite for personal healing and a condition for forgiving the wrongdoers (Andrew, 2000), a condition she believed was necessary before she could consider Algeria as 'home' once more. Since we are both survivors of the tragedy, Lamia brought me into her story, if only to remind me of my duty to vindicate through this research the importance of the instauration of truth and justice. Her narrative brought to the fore the fact that when a serious case of human rights violation occurs, wounds can only be healed if the truth is known, and that justice is the *sine qua non* condition for forgiveness (Andrew, 2000).

Finally, it is necessary to add that participants were not offered any incentive to participate; I counted solely on their sense of solidarity and their interest in the research.

### *Confidentiality*

In terms of confidentiality, I clearly explained to the participants in this research that I would not do anything that would, or might appear to, compromise their confidentiality (Maynard, 1994; Harding, 1987). This was discussed with interviewees before they agreed to take part and they were also provided with information sheets, and my confidentiality policy was also laid out on the first page of the survey for online participants. It was also made clear that only extracts from the interviews and online conversations would be quoted (accurately) in the thesis. To ensure greater confidentiality, the quotations only refer to the period women fled from Algeria and the country they have migrated to, with no further details. The names of cities are only cited with the permission of the interviewee. In some particular cases, and only if it was necessary, the qualifications women hold in the receiving countries were attached to the quotation. Each woman was given a written letter to explain this information, a written consent form to sign, and asked for permission to tape-record the interview. Those who were interviewed via Skype received the consent forms via email, and had to have signed and returned these within at least 24 hours of the interview otherwise their contributions would not be used. The names of the participants and some place names were changed to avoid recognition; it seemed prudent to avoid naming individuals, even though they are already online and therefore in the public domain. Respondents were assured that all data collected through face-to-face interviews, email interviews, Skype interviews and the online survey would be used for research purposes only, including academic publications and both offline and online academic journals.

### *Dissemination and debriefing participants*

I have offered to send participants a summary of my thesis and research results. I will also create online forums and blogs, where I will publish any papers or post-doctoral research arising from the thesis, through which they can express their views. The Facebook group

created for the case studies will remain as an interactive space for its members to continue the conversation on Algerian women's diaspora and other relevant topics.

### *Transcribing the interviews*

The majority of the interviews were conducted in French, *Derdja* (an Algerian dialect) or English. Because of the sensitivity of some issues, I have tried wherever possible to make a faithful and authentic translation of the responses in French and *Derdja*, although I retain certain words and metaphors in *Derdja* in my transcription. During this process, I would make a first draft transcript a few hours after the interview in order to keep the reflections and emotions as fresh as possible, the better to inform my research. However, the interviews conducted in France were an exception to this rule, partly as I was worried about confidentiality and partly because of social demands: my hosts had always planned some form of entertainment in the evening, which I could not excuse myself from without appearing ungracious. However, immediately I left an interview, I would write all my first impressions and feelings in a journal I always keep with me.

In the quotations cited in this thesis, I included some of my questions in order to show that the interviews were dialogically constructed in an open-ended process. In analysing the narratives, I was interested by both the told and untold stories, and tried to give meaning to both. Consequently, I deliberately added the non-verbal forms of communication that occurred during the interviews. Non-verbal communication is often associated with gender and culture (Knapp and Hall, 1992) as women are generally more non-verbally expressive than men, particularly in the Mediterranean and North African cultures from which the participants came. In fact, it has been recognised that women tend to have an overall superiority as users and decoders of non-verbal communication in many different cultures (Knapp and Hall, 1992). Highly skilled individuals, such as the participants in this study, possess a rich vocabulary and the ability to articulate their experiences fluently; nevertheless, their subtle and spontaneous use of non-verbal communication provided crucial auxiliary information concerning their true feelings and underlying messages.

I also included quotations from the survey in the data analysis whenever I felt it was relevant to confirm or clarify an argument in this way. Participants often added long

explanations to their answers, particularly in relation to issues around the lack of recognition of Algerian qualifications, the barriers faced when seeking access to jobs, their feelings of solidarity or otherwise with other Algerians in the receiving countries, and the barriers to returning to Algeria. Unlike the citations from the interviews, I have not named those who partook in the online survey in order to respect its anonymous approach.

### **Limitations and strengths of the research**

As with any research project, this study has its strengths and its weakness. By relying on an experimental method to recruit participants, for instance, I ran the risk that it might not work in the way I was expecting. However, this method was an essential part of the research question intended to show whether a network of highly skilled Algerian women existed, and if so, how large it was and to which parts of the world, other than France, these women fled during and following the Black Decade. During the first few months when recruitment was slow, I was already preparing a plan B, which was to travel and interview women I already knew. Of course, this would have had a great impact on the project since it would have demanded funds I could not readily access.

Another potential risk concerned the possible impact of the research on the group of women I was studying. A diaspora is sometimes regarded as an expression of the desire of a migrant community for separation from the surrounding population, and furthermore its members are sometimes seen as politically problematic, both in the receiving countries and countries of origin. It is necessarily a space in which migrants become more visible by virtue of their political claims and activities, and this holds dangers if they are living in an already hostile environment. The risk that my research group would be considered in this light was a question I was forced to reflect on throughout the research process; by highlighting its existence, the research could potentially accentuate the isolation of a group that may already feel alienated due to the gender, and religious and national background of its members, particularly given the fact that Islamophobia is currently on the increase in western countries.

The major strength of the research lies in the fact that I was able to see the social behaviour of the participants and their experiences through their eyes, as someone who belonged to this group of women.

### **Characteristics of the participants**

Nearly half (45 percent) of the research participants who had left Algeria were between the ages of 25 and 35, and a further 35 percent were under 25. Those aged between thirty-six and forty constituted only 13 percent. Five respondents were aged over 45, one of whom was in her sixties. Around a third (42 percent) left Algeria as university students (with first or second degrees), meaning they were eligible for student visas. Only 12 percent said they left as labour migrants, nine percent as refugees, three percent as undocumented migrants, and a further nine percent did not wish to state their reason for leaving the country.

The women who participated in the research held a variety of qualifications from educational institutions ranging from universities to high schools. Around a third had left Algeria holding a first degree or masters in humanities, 18 percent held masters degrees in science and technology, and nearly seven percent had PhDs in science and technology. Five percent were medical practitioners, two percent of whom were working as specialist doctors in teaching hospitals in Algiers before they left. Nearly half (43 percent) were willing to give more details about their qualifications and professions, which varied from journalism, law and architecture to medicine, dentistry and pharmacy. Some participants had graduated from prestigious Algerian academic institutions, such as ENA (Ecole National d'Administration), INA (Institut National d'Agronomie), ITFC (Institut de Technologie, Finance et Comptabilité), Ecole des Beaux Arts, and EMP (Ecole Militaire Polytechnique) (formerly ENITA). Nearly two-thirds (70 percent) said they had been working in Algeria prior to leaving, amongst whom 15 percent said they were 'very satisfied' with their jobs, and about a third stated they were 'satisfied'.

The participants had migrated to a wide range of countries. The largest group, nearly a third, had settled in France, 20 percent in the UK, 21 percent in Canada, 18 percent in Spain and seven percent in the US. Four participants responded from Belgium, two each from the United Arab Emirates (UEA), Italy and Switzerland, and one each from Australia, Qatar, Germany, Turkey and Tunisia. This shows the efficiency of the RDS method in reaching those who are geographically isolated but still connected to friends or



former colleagues. Two said that their first destination had been France but they had later moved to the US and Qatar, respectively. One respondent had left for the UAE but later went to the US; one migrated to East Africa, where she worked for an NGO, and then moved to Canada; and one left for the Canary Isles, later travelling on to mainland Spain. Two left for France but had returned to Algeria at the time of completing the survey. One participant explained: “I work for a company that moves me every year. I am now here, but when I’m off work, I spend my time between Algeria, visiting my family, and Marseilles, the city I love and where life is good.” In addition, only two participants revealed they wear the *hijab*, and only one revealed her sexual orientation as a lesbian.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explained the feminist standpoint of my methodology: for instance, I discussed the ontology and epistemology which influenced the design and conduct of my research. Feminist research allows for the use of innovative methods of data collection and this gave me the liberty to employ a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. I also included a statement about myself and my positioning within the research, and discussed how this affected the collection and analysis of the data, and the ethical issues involved. As it is difficult to assume nowadays that people migrate only to those countries with which they have some kind of connection, I needed to locate a very geographically dispersed group of women who left Algeria following the rise in violence in the 1990s, and the RDS method proved key to realising this ambition. I was only able to use RDS to recruit the participants as, due to technical issues, it was not possible to use the software to analyse the network. To complement my own knowledge of the situation in Algeria at the time, I conducted in-depth interviews with the participants, one of which proved particularly arresting in its depth and complexity, and which consequently became the core case study of the thesis. I also commented on the expressions of interest and solidarity I received from the many women I met during the course of my fieldwork. Finally, however, it is important to emphasise that this research is not concerned with generalising its findings to encompass an Algerian diaspora per se, but is intended to solely provide an interpretation of the data collected from this very specific set of migrants from Algeria, as will be seen in the following chapters.

### **Chapter Three: The Political Background to the Feminisation of Algerian Migration**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter is an attempt to address the historical conditions in which Algeria's 'Black Decade' or 'Dirty War' (*'la sale guerre'*) occurred. It explains how the post-colonial socialist regime of the FLN (National Liberation Front) imposed the doctrine of 'one land, one language and one religion' on the country, ignoring the legitimacy of the diverse national movements that had contributed to the liberation of the country from French colonial rule. However, in the 1990s, the fall of the Soviet Union and the discrediting of Soviet communism had significant implications for the FLN, both politically and economically. This was particularly the case as it took place around the same time as the collapse in the price of oil, which had a severe impact on Algeria as a major oil producer (Evans and Phillips, 2007). The oil crisis fed into the concurrent global downturn, exposing the corruption and bad governance of many one-party states, including Algeria. The IMF, World Bank and WTO shifted their focus from economic failure to failures of governance, and imposed the liberalisation of capital markets, alongside the introduction of democracy, as a condition for financial aid (Jordan and Duvell, 2003, p.32).

The first part of the chapter addresses the question of how these factors helped the emergence of the FIS (Islamic Salvation Front), a political party with a radical Islamist ideology. It first offers a definition of what is commonly understood by the concept of 'democracy' and its relationship to the lack of development and political participation that women experience in a predominantly patriarchal society, and it goes on to describe what provoked the tragedy of the Black Decade following the victory of the FIS in the first democratic elections to be held since liberation. It gives a brief illustration of how the Islamist movement evolved over time in a mainly Muslim society to become the main pole of resistance against colonialism, how it turned radical under the one-party authoritarian regime and violent in the face of the pluralism imposed by neoliberal international institutions. This was the situation in Algeria after the cancellation of the electoral process in 1992, at least two decades before the advent of the 'Arab Spring' in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011. The chapter's second section explains the impact of these events on the lives of Algerian women and how, and to what extent, they influenced the

decisions of many highly skilled professional women and female intellectuals to leave the country.

### **Democracy and women's rights in Algeria: chicken or egg?**

This section takes a brief look at the meanings given to the terms 'democracy' and 'human development', and then examines some ideas about how the two relate and how this relationship affected the democratic process in Algeria during the 1990s, the failure of which plunged the country into bloody internal conflict. It argues that the Algerian experience is particularly pertinent as it illustrates how the process of democracy, initiated during the 1990s with the encouragement of international institutions, witnessed the emergence of religious fundamentalism in the form of extremist political Islam, one of whose most menacing aspects was the hostility it bore towards gender equality and women's rights.

Algeria is part of the North African region that demographer John Caldwell places in a so-called 'patriarchal belt', an area that ranges from Asia and the Middle East to Africa (Moghadam, 1994). Within this broad, cross-continental region, social structures are shaped by the institutionalisation of restrictive 'codes of conduct' for women (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Many of the women under investigation experienced both physical and social violence, including the heavy patriarchal responsibility placed on them to transmit Algeria's cultural and national identity to the next generation, and this played a part in their decision to leave Algeria. However, it is arguable that the FIS victory and the subsequent outbreak of terror was not necessarily the starting point of this process, nor was its defeat the end point. As will be seen later, Algerian women may directly attach their struggle for women's human rights to the dichotomy between the private and public sphere that they also experience in the host societies to which they have fled.

According to John D. Stephens, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Evelyn Huber Stephens (1992), the western definition of democracy is essentially a liberal one: democracy means a system based on free, fair, regular elections and universal suffrage. This first, quite limited but widely used definition of democracy is, for example, associated with the World Bank. Thus, for the World Bank, democracy is seen as more or less equivalent to good governance (Leftwich, 2005). Democracy is more generally taken

to imply the protection of freedom of speech and basic civil rights, meaning that citizens have the ability to hold their rulers to account and their government is obliged to hear the voice of the people rather than represent its own or other powerful interests. The given meaning of democracy implies processes that go beyond the state itself and regular elections, and is in some ways a political/social definition; the focus is more on the purpose of the democratic process as a system of protection from arbitrary governance than simply its institutional features (Stephens *et al.*, 1992, p.43). One of the consequences of any authoritarian and military regime is the restrictions laid on women in their use of public space and their right to 'access the city' (see Chapter Four for a more detailed account of the concept of the 'right to the city'). Consequently, the better civil society is organised, the better the process of accountability and the responsiveness of decision-making is likely to be, and the more women benefit.

During the 1980s and 1990s, and following the end of the Cold War, many developing and Eastern European countries were obliged by international institutions to take steps towards instituting political pluralism, liberal democracy and good governance (Jordan and Duvell, 2003). The official reason given for requiring such changes was that these were 'good things' in themselves and were also likely to make it easier for those countries to make rapid gains in development. However, democracy should also ensure that all citizens are equal and have reasonably equal access to social services, regardless of gender or other distinguishing group characteristics (UN Human Development Report, 2002). Consequently, serious problems arise when democracy is introduced alongside the implementation of neoliberal policies of structural adjustment and economic reform that exacerbate inequality, as was the case in Algeria (Roberts, 2003).

It is important to note that since Algeria's independence political decisions have always been handled by the military, imposing the FLN as a dictatorial single-party system (Roberts, 2003, p.90). As the UN Human Development Report cited above states, dictatorships tend to be poorly informed and out of touch; they often misjudge their citizens' capabilities and needs. This was surely the case for the Algerian regime, whose members claimed they were in a better position than its citizens to know what was needed, meaning it had to take 'hard' decisions on behalf of society, such as the cancellation of the 1992's elections. Furthermore, dictatorships frequently argue that the electoral process

and other forms of democratic politics tend to cause disturbances and political instability which then impede foreign investment and economic development (Przeworski *et al.*, 2000). The post-colonial Marxist/socialist ideology of the Algerian state was supposed to ensure economic independence and growth, rebuilding a country destroyed by 130 years of French colonial rule (Roberts, 2003). The FLN adopted the motto, 'development first, democracy later', which it based on the country's post-colonial economic and social realities of unemployment, deprivation and lack of education.

The FLN's development strategy was financed by oil and gas revenues, which represented nearly 98 percent of Algeria's exports. During the 1960s and 1970s, this led to Algeria boasting one of the largest state sectors in the Third World; access to education, including higher education, health care and social protection was universal, and was widened to include women, despite the fact that patriarchy was still firmly rooted in Algerian society. However, at the same time, civil society, academic freedom and individual liberty were suppressed. Almost all of the so-called 'mass organisations' and trade unions were linked to the FLN and placed under the supervision of a branch of the Algerian army, the intelligence and internal security services, the *Securité Militaire* (SM), later known as the Department of Intelligence and Security (DRS), whose remit was to support the implementation of state development projects (Evans and Phillips, 2007). This situation encouraged corrupt members of the regime, including army officers, to use their positions of power to acquire wealth and privileges (Roberts, 2003). This trend, which continued for many years, greatly affected capital investment in development projects, particularly from the 1980s on, as well as the amount of financial assistance allocated to social services, housing and health care.

Despite repression, activists of all types, social-democrats (FFS), the socialist/communist left wing, Berberists, various manifestations of political Islam and (mainly left-wing) feminists began to oppose state policies, denounce corruption and demand democracy. During the late 1980s and following the fall in the oil price, Algerian citizens grew increasingly frustrated as the standard of living fell (Roberts, 2003, p.91). According to Lahaouari Addi (1991), the state's inability to provide practical solutions and to control corruption at a national level was blatant. On the 5 October 1988, a strike organised by one branch of the UGTA union degenerated into generalised rioting in

Algiers and other cities (Addi, 1991). The army bloodily repressed the riots and many protestors were killed or arrested and tortured. On 10 October, Ali Belhadj, a radical Islamist imam and Arabic teacher, called for a demonstration to denounce the repression that had taken place a few days earlier (Kepel, 2002). An impressive turnout of 20,000 people responded to his call and marched to Bab el Oued, which was one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Algiers (Roberts, 2004). The army intervened and once again responded with bullets, causing more deaths and injuries.

In the meantime, the World Bank and other international institutions decided to withdraw their support for dictatorial regimes, including Algeria's, and began to pressurise developing countries to introduce democracy (Leftwich, 1993). In response, the Algerian authorities adopted a new constitution in October 1989, and a multi-party system emerged, leading to the emergence of 60 political parties, including Islamic parties, formed out of the various political tendencies (Stone, 1997). However, by this stage, the majority of Algerians appeared to believe that only a fundamental religious movement such as the FIS would be capable of effectively opposing the regime (Roberts, 2003, p.174).

### **The rise of a radical Islamist movement in Algeria**

As many scholars of migration, diaspora and identity studies assert, it is necessary to understand the conditions that precede (and follow on from) the traumatic event that often lies behind the decision to migrate in order to fully understand the creation of networks of solidarity abroad and the development of a diasporic consciousness, including the 'myth of return'. For this reason, it is important to provide a brief insight into the political, social and economic conditions in which the fundamentalist Islamist movement in Algeria developed in its radical and violent form, and why, despite this, it was able to win the first democratic elections to be held in post-colonial Algeria. It is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, to explain the origin of political Islam, its radicalisation and espousal of violent forms of terrorism, or the way it has now spread far beyond Algeria, with international repercussions. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that this study differentiates between the fundamentalist Islamic movement, including its religious preachers, and those young people in Algeria who engaged in terrorist acts, even if they

used religious grounds to justify their attacks as a ‘holy war’ or ‘*jihad*’ against the ‘*taghut*’ (the rulers who obstructed the establishment of an Islamic state by cancelling the elections).

The fundamentalist character of the movement was revealed in its use of slogans such as the *dawa* (Islamic call) for a *dwala Islmya* (Islamic state) in which “*La mithak la doustour, Kala allah kala erassoul*” (there is “no pact and no constitution, but only Allah and the Prophet legislate”) and for which “*aliyha nhya ou alihya namout*” (“we will live and we will die”). This violent and nihilistic language encapsulates the ideology of the members of FIS, who were chanting slogans like these when protesting in the streets years before the cancellation of the electoral process in 1992. The euphoria of these slogans recruited thousands of Algerians to FIS, often young men who had already been nurtured in a patriarchal familial atmosphere in which they played the role of guarantor of their female relatives’ conduct. However, I myself also witnessed the radicalisation of women – neighbours and colleagues – and have drawn the conclusion that it is perhaps the imbalance of power between social, political and economic factors, specific to each society, that is the fundamental trigger of radicalisation. As Olivier Roy (2016), the French philosopher and expert on political Islam and its links to terrorism, asks, does this represent the “Islamisation of radicalism or a radicalisation of Islam”? According to Roy (2007), terrorism may arguably have its roots not in Islam but in the psychosocial background of the individuals concerned. These (mainly) young people, full of energy and frustration, feel disconnected from their parents’ generation whom they consider too traditional and politically amorphous. In the Algerian case, many young people who were attracted by the radical neo-Salafist discourse of imams such as Ali Belhadj (cited above) broke with the peaceful version of Sunni Islam espoused by their parents which has been predominant in the Maghreb (North Africa) for centuries (Samraoui, 2003).

That being said, a fundamentalist discourse proposing the creation of an Islamic caliphate as an alternative to the nation-state system first gained traction and began to spread in the colonial era in Pakistan and the Middle East. In 1928, a movement called the Muslim Brotherhood emerged in Egypt, whose self-proclaimed aim was to free the country from British colonialism, take back power and imbue Egypt with Islamic values. The assassination of its leaders, Hassan Al-Banna in 1949 and El Qutb in 1964, were

turning points that pushed the Brotherhood towards political violence and the creation of a clandestine armed wing, mainly funded by the Wahabi King Saoud of Saudi Arabia (McDougall, 2011). The ensuing repression that Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser unleashed against the Brotherhood was deadly. Meanwhile, in 1940s colonial Algeria, an Islamic movement of *ulama* (Muslim scholars) emerged, whose main purpose was to oppose the French secularism imposed in colonial schools (Singh, 2014). The leader of this movement, Abdelhamid Ibn Badis, an erudite Algerian from a conservative bourgeois family, had visited and studied in both Egypt and Tunisia and returned home influenced by the Brotherhood's ideology. He established *madrassas* (Islamic schools) in which Islam and the Koran were taught to young Algerians (Singh, 2014). Despite his recognition of Algerians' Berberity, Ibn Badis declared "Arabic to be our language, Islam our religion and Algeria our land" (Singh, 2014). Since Algerians are at least at 90 percent Muslim, the *ulama* played a crucial role in the Algerian movement of national liberation, which used the twin pillars of Arabism and Islam as mobilising concepts (McDougall, 2011). Following independence in 1962, the regime consolidated Ibn Badis's declaration, imposing Arabic as the official language of the nation and Islam as the religion of the state, the latter governing Algerians' private lives in matters of inheritance, affiliation, marriage and divorce. By contrast, it simultaneously engaged in imposing a rigidly 'socialist' industrial and agrarian revolution, detached from the Islamic values with which most Algerians are deeply connected.

Boutheina Cheriet (2005) dates the process which led to the emergence of radical Islam in the country from 1962. She shows how it arose out of opposition to the lack of academic freedom within educational institutions and the exclusion of religious programmes and ideas that did not conform to the official discourse of nationalism and socialism. At first, however, this indigenous movement was not radically Islamist. Extending her argument further, Cheriet (2005) mentions the Djazarist movement, led by Malek Bennabi, a follower of Ibn Badis, as being "far from fundamentalist or violent". Bennabi, an engineer educated in France, was fluent in French and Arabic. His ideas were grounded in the desire to reform Islamic thought and adapt it to the diversity of Algerian culture, including its Berber and North African dimensions. His movement, Haraket El Jaza'ara (Movement for Algerianisation), grew in popularity among Algerian students



during the 1970s and 1980s. Although Bennabi was not persecuted, the regime disregarded his ideas; instead, Arabic and religious education were taught by teachers ‘imported’ from Egypt and Syria – another element to consider when researching the development of political Islam in Algeria. There were also dissenting voices from inside the FLN itself, such as Mohamed Khider, who in 1965 railed in his magazine, *Humanism Musulman*, against the “Western clothing of Algerian women” and criticised the socialist policies of the FLN (Kider, 1965, cited in Roberts, 2003, p.9). Roberts also mentions Sheikh Soltani, a former member of the *ulama*, who broke with the regime in the 1970s and was forced into exile, from where he published a pamphlet denouncing the FLN’s socialist orientation and the lack of opportunity for citizens to participate in public affairs. Khider was later assassinated.

To implement its policies, the Algerian regime turned to its supporters in the PAGS (Vanguard Socialist Party), including university students who were affiliated to the party. Students of Islamic and liberal tendencies found themselves excluded from public debates, particularly during the consultations around the first National Charter in 1976. As a consequence, Islamist students started organising amongst themselves in campus prayer rooms, preaching political Islam and distributing Sayed Qutb’s seminal Islamist text, *Milestones*, and the videos of Abdelhamid Kichk, a radical Egyptian preacher and scholar of Islam. Arguably, the political wing of the radical Islamist movement, the FIS, which went on to contest and win local elections in the 1990s, arose out of these embryonic beginnings. However, by 1979, an underground Islamist armed movement (Mouvement Islamique Armée) had also emerged, dedicated to the imposition of an Islamic state by force. Around the same time, in 1980, a Berber Cultural Movement (MCB) appeared, agitating for the official recognition of Berber as Algeria’s national language. Both movements resonated with Algerians, particularly on the question of the monopoly exercised by the party in power over religion, language and other markers of diversity. The FLN responded with repression and the leaders of both movements were imprisoned and tortured.

In 1984, the regime implemented the Family Code, which suppressed women’s rights and their access to citizenship – a political move by which it hoped to retain those of its most conservative adherents who may have been tempted to join the opposition. Despite this, many of its members did join the radical Islamist movement, including

Abbassi Madani, who later became leader of the FIS. This party's rapid growth in Algerian society led it to win the country's first democratic elections since independence, in December 1991. When the regime decided to cancel the elections in January 1992, claiming it was acting to protect the republican nature of the nation-state, the FIS and its supporters reacted violently, revealing the existence in its ranks of an armed group that was ready to fight for and gain power with or without elections (Samraoui, 2003). The ensuing decade of violence is the backdrop for the next section.

### **Causes and patterns of Algerian women's forced migration in the 1990s**

#### *The impact of the Black Decade on women*

There has been little research on the Algerian tragedy of the 1990s, as well as a lack of literature and statistics relating to the ensuing mass exodus and the numbers of people internally displaced during that period and beyond. It has been argued, however, that the feminisation of migration from Algeria only started to rise after 1999, a fact that was illustrated by the survey conducted for this study. Indeed, more than half (53 percent) of the respondents left after 2000. Around a third (38 percent) left between 1996 and 2000, and only 18 percent left between 1990 and 1995. Nine declared they had left before 1990 but could not go back to Algeria because of the instability and violence.

Meryem Alaoui (2010) indicates that the Algerian economy may have suffered to the tune of tens of billions of dollars during the conflict. A significant portion of this loss may be accounted for by the forced dispersal of a large number of highly qualified men and women, the intellectuals or professionals who were the elite of the Algerian middle class. The victory of the Islamist party in December 1991 was perhaps the first event that sparked their fears. When, on 11 January 1992, the regime decided to cancel the electoral process and declare a state of emergency, this class was divided into '*eradicateurs*', those who agreed with the cancellation, and '*dialoguistes*', those in favour of allowing the democratic process to take its course and engaging in dialogue with the FIS. The *dialoguistes* predicted that cancellation would lead to civil war, and were later proved correct (Alaoui, 2010, p. 271). It is important to mention that women in the latter group did not necessarily support the FIS; rather, they were in favour of democratic continuity, in the belief that only democracy could produce the rule of law and give women the

opportunity to exercise full citizenship (Moghadam, 1994). For such women, halting the democratic process was more likely instead to ensure “the continuity of the traditional structures of power” (Chomsky, 1999, p.xv).

At that time, the feminist movements and organisations found themselves at a low ebb in terms of activism (Ghezali, 1999; Lalami, 2012). Their main focus had been the patriarchal institutions dominating the whole of Algerian society, but added to these private/public struggles, the political situation brought women to the forefront of the conflict, subjecting them to persecution from both sides. The battle over the elections ended in a decade of horror, the Black Decade. In the preface to *An Inquiry into the Algerian Massacres*, Chomsky (1999) called for an independent international inquiry into the conflict, describing the situation as “a reign of horror”. According to Alaoui (2010), the rise in violence, added to the bad governance of the country during the 2000s, was responsible for a huge rise in the feminisation of migration over the years from the Black Decade on (from about 36 percent in 1982 to 51 percent in 2010). The phenomenon was particularly noticeable in Quebec: the Canadian province in fact became a place of exile for thousands of Algerian women, most of them highly educated, who had been politically involved in the various sides of the conflict. Alone or with their families, these women fled the persecution of not only the fundamentalists but also their own communities and, in some cases, the Algerian security services. The investigation conducted by Alaoui (2010) in both France and Quebec reveals that the majority of these women had been, to varying degrees, involved in women’s rights movements in Algeria; some had even chaired trade unions and/or local organisations fighting for women’s rights. They initiated or took part in sit-ins and protests in the major cities of Algeria to counter the rise of the fundamentalist movement and to denounce acts of intolerance and violence against women and the increasing numbers of terrorist attacks. This had made them visible targets for all sides in the conflict. Fearing for their lives, concerned about the future of their children, and finding their inferior status and the social pressures to which they were subjected no longer tolerable, these women took the path of exile – mainly to countries like France and Canada, where they found some sort of protection (Alaoui, 2010).

It is important to mention that although these women saw themselves as political exiles, their legal status was hostage to the gender-blind international refugee regime and

the asylum policies in their host countries. Even though France was traditionally the main receiving country for Algerian migrants, it was difficult for women who fled the conflict in the 1990s to be recognised as political refugees (as defined by the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention). In fact, the French government turned a blind eye to the failure of the Algerian government to protect its citizens from the armed Islamist movement. According to Alaoui (2010), the French authorities supported the idea that the suspension of the electoral process, considered by many to be a military coup, was justified by the need to protect the republican nature of the Algerian state and its citizens against fundamentalism. This study, however, does not have any pretensions towards entering into the controversy over the involvement of the French government in the conflict, which remains undocumented and difficult to assess objectively.

#### *The making of an Algerian female diaspora*

There is uncertainty about exactly when the feminist movement in Algeria began. Peter Knauss (1987), a political scientist and Africa expert, states that Algerian feminism began in the first half of the 20th century when a middle class which had graduated from the French colonial education system began to emerge. This class was comprised of highly skilled Algerians, generally from the *petite bourgeoisie* (doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, and so on), who were mainly concentrated in the big cities; by contrast, the majority of the country remained very conservative, attached to strict Islamic rules and an indigenous patriarchal culture, partly because they had been deliberately kept in a backward state by the colonial system. It was from the new middle class that an Algerian intellectual elite emerged, and with it, nationalist and progressive movements, including a feminist movement (Gadant, 1995). Although there were fewer highly educated women than men, women of this new social class were encouraged to further their studies, remove their veils and fully participate in the Algerian liberation struggle. Dazzled by the number and the quality of women who joined the revolution, Franz Fanon (1967), the Caribbean philosopher and revolutionary who supported the Algerian revolution, declared Algerian women to be the pioneers of Third World feminist movements. Decades later, however, women in Algeria found that many of the rights they had won in the intervening years had been compromised by the implementation of the 1984 Family Code, based as it was in

*sharia* law (Lalami, 2012). This officialised polygamy and the husband's right to repudiate his wife, and ruled that a woman could not leave the country – or even the conjugal home – without her husband's permission, and that even once she had obtained her husband's permission to work, she still required his further permission to move from one workplace to another. This law had a huge impact on the careers of female academics, as attending conferences and meetings or networking outside the university or workplace are crucial steps towards attaining a more senior position.

The brain drain of Algerian women, however, began in the aftermath of independence, around the 1970s. As it was a silent and gradual phenomenon it is not well known and poorly documented, if at all. The case of three highly qualified women – Assia Djébar, Fadela M'Rrabet and Malika Mokadem – who chose to leave Algeria soon after independence, because they could not live and work in such unsatisfactory conditions, is a telling example of this flight of women intellectuals. The first and most prominent, Assia Djébar, a celebrated novelist and member of the Académie Française, had been the only female professor of contemporary Algerian history to work at the University of Algiers after the 1960s. Jane Hiddlestone (2007, 248), a specialist on the work of Djébar, writes: “[Her] novels are clearly focused on the creation of a genealogy of Algerian women, and her political stance is virulently anti-patriarchal as much as it is anti-colonial.”

Another important Algerian feminist of that period, Fadéla M'Rabet, not only held a doctorate in biology but was also a communist activist and the author of a number of books on Algerian women. M'Rabet (1983) was suspended from her job as a science teacher because her work criticised patriarchal attitudes towards young girls. Her radio talk show, devoted to answering the questions of young women, which revolved around their experience of social oppression, landed her in trouble with the Algerian regime and she was eventually forced to take the route of exile to France in 1967. As M'rabet herself explains:

My generation fought for dignity, both in Algeria and France ... This really embarrassed the government to the point that they blocked all mail addressed to us. I was even called by the Minister of Information at that time, who told me that I was too impatient and that he was willing to sacrifice women to save the revolution. (M'Rabet, 1983, p.35)

In fact, it is often the case that newly independent countries renege on their principles of autonomy and freedom, and deny access to the public sphere, particularly to women, who are seen as guardians of the values of the private sphere and are not allowed to step outside this role. Valentina Moghadam (1994) explains that the ideology of nationalism adopted in the Third World used women as symbols of collective liberation and role models for the new nationalist patriarchal community. Mahfoud Bennoune (1999, p.23), for example, considers the fate of Algerian women in the armed liberation struggle: despite their full participation in the liberation army, their status was quickly reshaped “by the urgent needs of the male to restore Islam as the religion of the state, Arabic as the unique language and themselves as sovereigns of the family”. Women who opposed this restoration were accused of being disloyal to the nation and to Islam, and were “sent back to their private spheres” (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008, p.42).

The third example is Malika Mokkedem, who also left Algeria during the 1970s. She trained as a medical nephrologist but is also a well-known feminist and novelist who has received numerous literary awards. The majority of her novels are overtly critical of the attitude of Algeria’s patriarchal society towards women. Of course, there are other similar cases that could be mentioned; these highly qualified women are just the most prominent examples of numerous women who fled Algeria due to the constraints placed on them following independence. As explained above, these restrictions were based on deep-rooted patriarchal customs that were officially legitimised by Article 2 of the Algerian Constitution, which declares Islam as the religion of the state and promulgates a family law which confines Algerian women to the role of second-class citizens. It seems that Fanon’s optimistic vision, when he declared women’s emancipation in post-colonial Algeria as a model for the Third World, rapidly faded (Guemar, 2011).

During the political and economic crisis of the 1980s, which led to the rise of Islamist movements, unveiled women with access to the public sphere were singled out for censure (Benoune, 1999). The strict cultural and religious codes stating what is deemed proper behaviour for women imposed boundaries that kept them in a position of powerlessness (Guemar, 2011). As such, they were placed in a vulnerable position that often made them the first victims of political, economic and social repression, as gender-

based boundaries, being neither immutable nor stable, are constantly contested and transgressed, and thus transformed “across spaces and time” (Crawley, 2001, p.6). By taking the journey into exile in the 1960s and 1970s, the three Algerian feminist academics cited above paved the way, in many respects, for a larger exodus of female intellectuals, which reached its peak during the last decade – the post-conflict or post-Black Decade period. The courage it took to leave Algeria during the crucial era of post-colonisation and national reconstruction, and the fact that, despite the social burden imposed on them as women, they managed to re-build successful professional lives in exile, means they were considered role models by many younger Algerian women, myself included.

Algerian sociologist Hocine Labdellaoui (2012) stresses the problematic lack of data concerning the migration of Algerian women. Nevertheless, according to statistics published by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) in 2008, this migratory flow evolved as follows: from 6.45 percent in 1954 to 32.31 percent in 1975, increasing to 42.35 percent in 1990, and finally reaching a peak in 1996. Other sources, however, reveal a further important increase in the feminisation of Algerian migration commencing in 2000. The move into exile, following their resistance to the harsh effects of Algerian patriarchy, was the common trajectory followed by the celebrated female intellectuals cited above.

#### *The legal and social situation of women in Algeria*

This phenomenon, however, failed to raise concern about women’s situation in the sphere of Algerian political decision-making. This lack of interest is closely linked to women’s status in the country; policy-makers do not appear to consider the situation of women as an essential social issue. As French-Algerian journalist Zakya Daoud (1996) pointed out in an interview: “As soon as [it was] created, the Algerian state refused to give itself the tools to exist.” Comparing Algerian with Tunisian family law, which at the time allowed more gender equality in practice, Daoud went on to explain that Algeria was now paying the price of the bloody conflict of the 1990s. As mentioned above, although the Algerian Constitution (Article 29) makes no distinction between men and women, the Family Code subjugates women to the authority of men and to Algerian patriarchal customs. Consequently, the equal constitutional rights of women are nullified in practice by a

family law that is built on the hierarchical organisation of Algerian society. The policy-makers have always turned a blind eye to this schizophrenic reality, which consists in giving women equality with one hand and taking it away with the other, and feminist efforts to challenge the constitutionality of the Family Code continue to be ignored (Lalami, 2012). This duplicity is confirmed by the attitude of the Algerian regime towards the ratification of the Convention for Eliminating Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In May 1996, in keeping with the patriarchal values which constitute the cornerstone of the Family Code, Algerian policy-makers put forward reservations to some of CEDAW's articles on the pretext that they were incompatible with Islam as the religion of the state (Article 2 of the Algerian Constitution). This legal and constitutional incoherence severely hampered Algerian women's professional advancement and self-development.

The Tunisian historian Latifa Lakhdar (2002), a specialist in Islamic thought, has written a study called *Imra'atu I'ijmâ* (*Women in the Mirror of Muslim Orthodoxy*), which skilfully deconstructs the orthodox vision which keeps North African Muslim women imprisoned in an unchanging model. Lakhdar explains that a dogmatic conception of the foundations of Islamic law, built on a literal reading of the *Quran*, has produced a religious discourse that essentialises women. This construction, claiming to draw its legitimacy from the divine word, "places the woman in the sacred space. And we know that the sacred defies history and always seeks to remain outside historicity: that is already the greatest tactic of marginalization" (Lakhdar, 2007). As explained earlier, however, violence towards women was already institutionalised in Algerian society, potentially carrying the seeds of future conflicts (Lalami, 2012).

The growth in the number of highly qualified women migrating from Algeria around the 1970s was partially the result of the difficulties they faced in achieving personal development and successful careers because of the constitutional status of women and their social position. However, it has only been in the early years of the 21st century, mainly during its first decade, that studies and reports such as those of Fatiha Dahmani-Lovich (2006) has revealed the extent of the growing feminisation of Algerian migration, especially the significantly greater numbers of female journalists, academics, medical doctors and university lecturers leaving the country. The state/fundamentalist



crisis, accompanied by the high level of assassinations of women around the mid-1990s, corresponded with the first great wave of women's migration (Alaoui, 2010), but the crisis only amplified and highlighted the on-going phenomenon of violence against women, rendering it more visible. However, it is clear that Islamic terrorism targeted women first, especially educated women, and thus triggered the migration of whole families towards safer countries. The assassinations, kidnapping and rape of women by terrorist groups also caused a deep sense of shock in the collective psyche of Algerian society and left no other form of escape apart from fleeing – for those who could afford it. On the basis of the available data, then, it is clear that the post-1990s recorded its highest flow of migration of women, especially educated women; it can be deduced that violence was the reason for this vast female brain drain.

Nevertheless, looking deeper into the history of contemporary Algeria from a gender perspective and comparing two crucial periods for women's rights – namely, the post-independence and the post-Black Decade periods<sup>5</sup> – it is clear that this phenomenon is much more complex than it first appears. It has manifold causes and needs to be closely scrutinised. The rise of fundamentalism and terrorist acts against women undoubtedly had a catalytic effect on the mass feminisation of Algerian migration, but they arguably served to hugely amplify an already on-going subterranean trend. An argument can be made that instead of being the main cause, the Black Decade simply swelled an already existing migratory movement of Algerian women, a movement that society and especially policy-makers did not want to address because it required a more insightful and critical historical analysis of the ingratitude of the post-independence state towards those women who had whole-heartedly participated in the war of independence (Dahmani-Lovichi, 2006). This led to a growing awareness, especially amongst highly qualified women, that independence had not brought the freedom that women expected; they felt betrayed. The growing exodus of professional women can therefore be linked to Algeria's contemporary

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<sup>5</sup> Fatema Oussedik (2014), speaking at the International Feminin Congres (International Women's Congress) in Oran, explains that following the Black Decade even the more conservative families began to allow their daughters to travel abroad to work or study, and to marry foreigners or non-Muslims, taking the 'risk' of having non-Muslim grandchildren. Of course, they have to prove to the family and society at large that the foreign spouse has converted to Islam and that a religious marriage, conforming to *sharia* law, has taken place, even if this is not true.

history and its programme of ‘nation-building’, and the way legislators dealt with the place of women in the post-colonial nation state. This migratory movement later coincided with a further debasement of women’s status resulting from both radical Islamist-based violence during the Black Decade and the inertia of the Algerian regime when it came to offering women effective protection against it.

Thus two important periods of policy development in contemporary Algeria were arguably the crucial turning points in the history of Algerian feminism: namely, the post-independence period and the war against civilians in the Black Decade. These periods were vital in women’s history if we consider the way they affected their lives. If the latter period was known on an international level as the ‘Decade for Women’ (Kabeer, 2013), in Algeria it was certainly the decade *against* women. There are some important similarities between these post-war and domestic conflict periods that it is worth underlining if we want to shed light on the trend of the female brain drain from Algeria. During these two unstable moments, the definition of the nation state was at stake, and of course, from this perspective, so was the place and role of women in society. Daoud (1996, p.153) comments that “the Algerian woman became an issue at stake in the societies in conflict”, and adds that the fierce political battle over the definition of the state “was concentrated and organized around the dialectic of honor”. Algerian women were the greatest losers in this fight since they could not intervene in the process of policy-making at that time. In both eras, the Algerian regime, which was heavily male-dominated, imposed its patriarchal and conservative views, excluding the question of women’s rights. This resulted in the sacrifice of women for the sake of the political and material interests of men.

During these two periods women faced great violence, and the very fact of their existence was effectively denied. Although aware that they were always the most exposed members of society – as is the case for women during any conflict – Algerian women struggled and resisted with great courage during the war of liberation and the conflict of the 1990s. After independence, Algerian women had believed they would gradually gain access to equal rights with men through education and a change in the Algerian mentality. Even if some of them – the most educated – chose the route of exile, the majority remained in Algeria in the hope that they would see society evolving from a patriarchal system

towards a modern social organisation. Peter Knauss (1987) explains that the dilemmas thrown up by Algeria's brutal colonial heritage clearly placed a burden on Algerian women: they were caught between the process of reclaiming their Berber and Muslim identity and participating in building the new nation.

Yet, for a time after the war of liberation, it did seem as though women's hopes were to be fulfilled: during the presidency of Houari Boumediene (1965-1972), the construction of a new nation based on a socialist ideology was linked to the decision to encourage women to study. Pierre Bourdieu explains in his *Algerian Sketches* (2013) that many Algerians at the time were convinced they should give priority to their children's education, both their sons' education and daughters'. This was particularly important because for a long time it had been said that education ruined girls: to send a girl to school, to teach her French, was tantamount to encouraging her to adopt European customs and habits, tempting her with the chance of escaping her father's authority, and later her husband's. Working-class families, however, especially those in urban areas, began to encourage their daughters in the same way as they did their sons to go and 'get instruction', schooling and education (Bourdieu, 2013, p.199); working-class fathers decided that you can trust an educated woman and so came to believe that young women must be brought up to go out to work and not simply stay at home as before.

However, women and girls were never allowed to reach their full potential. Natalya Vince (2014) claims that Algerian women, despite their active participation in the country's liberation from French colonisation, were very quickly relegated to the kitchen in post-colonial Algeria, and even during the struggle, although many participated in the frontline combat against the French army as nurses or soldiers, their male counterparts also expected them to do the domestic chores such as cooking and washing – in other words, to also carry out the so-called 'women's roles'. In a sense, and as the personal testimonies gathered during this research confirms, Algerian women have never really left the kitchen: professional women have the household and children to attend to as well as their study and work. Following independence, women were encouraged to enter health care, education and other occupations, if only because Algeria was in need of rapid development and lacked professionals in every field, from fashion design to medicine and education (Bourdieu, 2013). Women were also encouraged to work as civil

servants. There was no taboo on women studying science and technology, and hundreds became scientists and researchers (in my own case, for instance, in non-destructive testing, a field that is usually a male preserve even in the most developed countries). For this reason, it is arguable that although Algerian women failed to prevent the implementation of the Family Code, they are often more politicised than most of their western sisters on comparable issues.

Even before the cancellation of the electoral process in which FIS, the Islamist party, won the highest number of votes, however, the social atmosphere had become increasingly unfavourable to unveiled, French-speaking professional and working women in general. Women known to be communists active in the PAGS or standing for political parties other than those with Islamic tendencies were particularly singled out for censure. Martin Evans and John Phillips (2007, p.168) cite the testimony of a woman who was standing for the FFS (Socialist Forces Front) in the region of Kabylia: “There are threats against my children and myself ... when I drive around, people gesture at me as if they are going to cut my throat. But I will not let them intimidate me.” According to Evans and Phillips (2007), during the elections on 26 December 1991, western journalists present in the polling stations in Bab Eloued, a part of Algiers where the FIS was firmly implanted, reported seeing women wearing the *niqab* or *tchador* voting several times. Once the ballot papers were counted there were accusations of fraud. This incident shows how the daughters, wives and mothers of the Islamist leaders were used during the electoral process. However, left-wing and liberal political parties equally used ‘their women’ to influence the cancellation of the electoral process.

Despite women’s strong presence at the FFS rally in Algiers on 3 January 1992, which called for a vigilant stand against a military coup, six days later thousands of women also demonstrated against the eventual victory of FIS, fearful of what would happen once it gained access to legislative power. Undoubtedly, many women were concerned by the pronouncements emanating from the leaders of the FIS at the time: for example, they warned athlete Hassiba Boulmerka, the first woman from an Arab or African nation to win a world track championship, and the first Algerian to win an Olympic medal, not to run with bare legs in front of an international public (Evans and Philips, 2007). Indeed, following the first electoral round, a prominent leader of the FIS declared that “from now

[on], Algerians are advised to change their way of dressing, eating and behaving” (Evans and Phillips, 2007). Women were the first to perceive this declaration as a specific threat: “It’s worse for us than others because we are girls” (Salima Tlemçani, cited in Evans and Phillips, 2007, p.170). Yet many observers and political actors, including journalists and sociologists, considered the cancellation of the electoral process to be a military putsch, not only against the FIS or political Islam, but also against the left-wing activists of the FFS, including feminists, and against those civil servants who might take advantage of democratic institutions to denounce corruption and claim a voice in the Algerian political debate.

In addition to the political violence of the regime and the physical violence of the Black Decade, the Algerian authorities showed no willingness to protect women from rape, ill treatment or assassination by both sides during the conflict. Worse still, a few years after the end of the bloody civil war, the Algerian regime negotiated an amnesty, excluding women’s associations from the debate, particularly the mothers of the disappeared (Algeria-watch , mars 2015). Yet these mothers were the only social group to have maintained its demand for justice and truth regarding the hundreds who disappeared during the Black Decade. The group has held a vigil every Wednesday in a public spot in Algiers for more than 20 years, despite police attempts to impede them, on occasion beating up its chairwoman. Although the majority of the disappeared are believed to be men, unverifiable sources have also denounced the disappearance of hundreds of women and girls. Unfortunately, there are no records and all research on this topic is fiercely suppressed. It was due to such actions by the authorities, particularly the introduction of the amnesty, that more and more educated women became convinced that far from improving, the situation was reverting and that, once more, they would have to pay the price. It seemed clear that any negotiations would be at their expense: for example, the Law of Reconciliation rehabilitated those terrorists who agreed to lay down their arms, without giving their victims justice, especially their women victims. In 1996, at the peak of the conflict, and following the reservations to the ratification of CEDAW put forward by the Algerian government, the journalist Salima Tlemçani (cited in Evens and Phillips, 2007, p.108) denounced this betrayal saying, “the promises made to women have not been kept”. As a result, the majority of highly educated women, aware that the Algerian

government had sacrificed them in order to placate the fundamentalist opposition, began to see leaving the country for a safer country as the only way to survive.

The history of women's struggle for emancipation in Algeria, therefore, has been long and hard. By the end of the Black Decade, women's optimism had turned to pessimism. Even if the beginnings of a civil society, triggered by the constitution of 1989, witnessed a flourishing of numerous feminist associations, which has continued up until recent times, women still faced and continue to confront numerous obstacles on their way to liberty. Every Algerian regime has always put impediments in the way of women's exercise of full citizenship. The implementation of the Family Code in 1984 (due to pressure from the radical Islamist and conservative tendencies already existing in the ranks of the FLN) and the different reservations placed on the ratification of CEDAW in 1996 overtly illustrate the lack of any political will to encourage the emancipation of Algerian women. In February 2005, women welcomed certain amendments to the Family Code, particularly the nationality code, which reformed or cancelled articles that impeded the right of the children of a woman with a non-Algerian husband to Algerian nationality. This surely was a moment when the limitations of the patriarchal system were challenged and overturned, and it is considered a victory against the whole North African patriarchy. However, Algerian women continue to fight for the complete abolition of the Family Code and its replacement by a civilian code that treats men and women equally, as specified by Article 29 of the Algerian Constitution. It is clear that the Family Code, seen in its wider context, exacerbates the challenges that all Algerian women face, professional women in particular. This fact has convinced even more young women to leave the country, since it appears to them that changes in patriarchal Algerian society will not come any time soon. According to feminist lawyer Nadia Ait Zai (2009, p.22): "The family law inspired by pure Islamic tradition is the main obstacle to the emancipation of women. It even generates violence towards women as men's and women's relationships are based on subordination and submission."

There is sufficient evidence to show that the Black Decade was the nodal point of the wave of highly skilled women's departures, giving the trend more visibility, and it is hardly surprising that the peak year for women's migration, at least to France, was 1996 (Bouklia-Hassane, 2011). According to Rafik Bouklia-Hassane (2011), however, the

steady rise in the number of highly qualified Algerian women leaving the country continued: the growth rates rose from 1.18 percent between 1990 and 2000 to 2.7 percent between 2000 and 2006. Bouklier-Hassane (2011) also explains that the growth of the feminisation of highly skilled migration is more telling than that of other categories of Algerian women migrants; it is a significant sign of continuing dissatisfaction with and intolerance of the conditions women live in. In fact, nothing has really changed for women, even if the bloody conflict has long since ended; violence and discrimination towards women, which is deeply ingrained in Algerian society, has appeared to have been implicitly justified and legitimated by the official amnesty, since the victims of the Black Decade did not receive any justice (Lloyd, 2006). Bouklier-Hassane (2011) also adds that the politics of the western host countries and their fluctuating needs for highly skilled migrants is also a factor to consider when examining the phenomenon.

## **Conclusion**

The violence that occurred during the Black Decade, therefore, was rooted in Algeria's historical conditions and the events of the late 1980s and early 1990s. This period shook the post-colonial one-party Algerian regime: the fall of the Soviet Union and its ideological underpinning; the collapse in the price of oil, which led to economic instability in the country; the imposition of the liberalisation of markets by the international financial institutions, with the subsequent rise in inequality, all contributed to weakening its hold. These factors affected all of Algerian society and contributed to the emergence of the FIS (Islamic Salvation Front), a political party with a radical Islamist ideology, from amongst the different political trends opposing the regime. The Islamist movement had evolved over time in a mainly Muslim society to become the main pole of resistance against colonialism, turning radical under the one-party authoritarian regime and violent in the face of the pluralism imposed by the neoliberal international institutions. The ensuing tragedy of the Black Decade followed the democratic victory of the FIS and the cancellation of the electoral process by the Algerian military. These events had a dramatic impact on the lives of Algerian women, already severely constricted by legal and social restrictions, and they certainly influenced the decisions of many highly skilled women, professionals and intellectuals, to flee Algeria.

## **Chapter Four: Fragmented Narratives of the Black Decade (Part 1)**

### **Lamia's Story – Reasons for Leaving: Terror, Trauma and Gender**

#### **Introduction**

The following two chapters (Chapters Four and Five) comprise one woman's narrative of surviving the Black Decade in Algeria. It represents an important contribution to the current analysis by offering a very immediate way of understanding the impact of terror on women's lives, as well illuminating their struggles, and the way they realise their agency, in constructing new lives when forced to take the route of exile. This narrative is of course a unique testimony, but it is one that can be generalised to better understand the nature of the violence committed by both the security forces and the Islamist armed forces; it also has the particular merit of highlighting the importance of justice and truth in achieving forgiveness, healing and reconciliation between Algerians. This raises questions of 'imagining home' and the development of a diasporic consciousness, albeit one fashioned by gender and other social constructs. Trauma survivors often try to fit their stories into a framework and place themselves within it in a way that makes sense of their experiences, but as Molly Andrews (2010, p.153) says, "what happens when no sense can be made?" Arguably, this was the case with the confused horror of Algeria's Black Decade. As a consequence, Lamia relates her narrative in a nonlinear and non-chronological manner; in order to convey her experience faithfully, the following two chapters for the most part reproduce her narrative flow, while at the same time deconstructing her story using the theoretical and conceptual tools outlined in Chapter One to reveal insights that are fundamental to this research.

#### **Who is 'Lamia'?<sup>6</sup>**

I met Lamia through the online network I built using the RDS method (see Chapter Two). Following her desire to know more about my research, I added her to my Facebook page (*Algerian Women Diaspora*), where she frequently left comments. I noted that she consulted the page on a daily basis, often several times a day. By chatting on Facebook, we discovered that we had many mutual Algerian women friends, some of whom still live

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<sup>6</sup> All names and places have been changed for purposes of confidentiality.



in the country and others who moved abroad following the Black Decade. After she learned that I had moved to London in 2013, Lamia sent me a message on a chat-room site with her phone number and invited me for a coffee. Since then we met from time to time and formed a friendly relationship. During one of our meetings, she once again showed an interest in my research, so I asked if she would like to give me an interview about her experiences. She did not agree on that day but called me a few days later saying that she was in a very bad state and wanted to speak to me. When I arrived, it was late; her son was sleeping and her husband at work. It was the anniversary of her father's death, and she explained that she was in the UK when he died and she had been unable see him or even attend his funeral. She said how hard it was to be so far from home in such circumstances. The conversation lasted two hours and Lamia was often in tears. She told me how her friends in London do not really understand her distress and that there are some experiences that she cannot speak about with anyone. Her willingness to confide in me, however, indicated her trust in me, and this made me feel comfortable interviewing her. A few weeks later, I reiterated my desire to conduct an interview. She asked if it could wait until her husband and son had gone on holiday. Around four months later she rang, saying: *"I [have given] them a lift to the airport and have come back shattered; I'm too tired right now but I'm happy for you to come tomorrow afternoon."* So I went the following day, and after exchanging greetings, she told me that she was not feeling too good as her boss had just informed her that she was to be made redundant within the next few months. She insisted, however, that was used to fighting and would surely find a new job. Then, after she had signed the consent form and read the information sheet about my research, we started the interview, which took place in her living room and lasted one hour and 55 minutes. Lamia speaks French, Algerian and English, but the interview was in Algerian, and I subsequently translated it into English. The story is necessarily untidy – there is a constant transposition in both space and time: between Algeria and the UK, and between the 1990s and now. She was an ordinary English teacher, not from a culturally French influenced family. She escaped her father's rules /her village only to fully exert her rights as an educated woman, but she ended up experiencing sexual harassment, regional/gender discrimination and random terrorist attacks along her journey. Although she mentioned RCD (a secular political party), Lamia was not affiliated with any political

party. She did not belong to any network in Algiers and so never had an adequate job related to her studies. I know too well how it was impossible to survive in these conditions, I was fascinated by her degree of resilience and her success in surmounting “Kilimanjaro”, facing a deeply implemented patriarchal mentality, all on her own. Lamia has lived in London since 1994 and is married to someone from her home village in Algeria. At the time of the interview she was working as a project manager with an organisation that provides special assistance to the elderly, and so has accumulated a huge amount of experience of working with vulnerable adults. She has also worked as an interpreter in French, Arabic, Berber and English. Lamia introduced herself as an Algerian woman, giving her original nationality first and then her gender: “OK ... *euuh* ... *right* ... *me, I’m an Algerian woman.*” Although she is a British citizen, she did not mention this.

### **The gendered origins of personal trauma**

Lamia said that she lived in Algeria during the first half of the 1990s, and left in 1994. She immediately followed this information with a rhetorical question: “*Right, the reason why I left? It was a cocktail of reasons...*” She stated that she felt a complete loss of hope after her cousin was killed and it was this that triggered her departure. However, as will be confirmed later, her narrative appears to suggest that one of the main reasons for leaving was connected to her professional identity, and particularly her identity as an educated woman:

*I was an English teacher, and as a teacher, I had difficulties finding a job in Algeria. I lost my job and it was very hard for me to find [another] job after [my cousin] was killed. Maybe it was difficult because we have the same name. But no, it wasn’t only that...*

It is necessary here to interpose a brief explanation. During this period only the government-run secondary schools taught English. It was not until 2005 that English teaching was extended to primary schools, and in 2008 to private institutions of higher and further education, in which Lamia might have found employment. At the time, jobs in the educational sector had fallen victim to IMF restrictions, and a successful application to the Ministry of Education was dependent on knowing someone influential, having a

relative in the sector or being part of a network. Lamia, however, was not from Algiers and possessed neither a network nor influential friends. This inequality was rife throughout the education system. ‘Wahiba’, another woman I interviewed in London, reveals the effects of the unspoken prejudice in universities at the time against young women who came from outlying villages and towns, and who (due to lack of connections in the city) had to live on campus while studying:

*This is from my experience of studying in Constantine. I used to feel sorry for those girls [who lived] on campus. You know, they may go out with the boys, but when it comes to marriage, parents will never allow their sons to marry a girl who has lived on the university campus. Often, girls were left pregnant or had to go for illegal abortions. This, in the majority of cases, would prevent them from going back to their villages or smaller cities.*

More recently, on 10 December 2013, a private Algerian TV channel, Ennahar TV, broadcast a documentary purporting to show the lives of female students on the campus of Algiers University. The documentary used material based on a secret investigation into the students’ private lives; some were shown smoking and drinking. The documentary was considered scandalous by Algerian feminists, as well as by Algerian women abroad, who thought that it degraded the image of female students. Although it triggered the indignation of many Algerian students and parents, and the political parties condemned the programme, it has since been reported that several fathers decided to summon their daughters back home in the middle of the 2014 academic year. According to the testimonies of female students, after the broadcast many of them were subjected to physical and verbal abuse by male passers-by in the street. It seems that it placed all female students living on campus at risk of sexual aggression. This is surely a regression from the position where, immediately after independence, as Pierre Bourdieu (2013, p.199) reports in his book, *Algerian Sketches*, “people [were] beginning to realise that going to school, there’s education, and with education, you can trust a woman”.

It appears from Lamia’s narrative that before she moved to the UK in 1994, she spent more than three years living on the university campus until she was forced to leave.

She did not give any details about this but simply said: *“I wasn’t allowed to stay anymore, so I went to stay with my auntie.”* Lamia never went back to her village. This may have been due to a breakdown in her relationship with her community and her family, particularly with her father whom she describes as very authoritarian. The other unspoken reason may have been the need to get a job following graduation. Considering the importance she gives to work in her narrative, it may be the case that the high level of rural unemployment during the 1990s prevented her from going back.

The chronology in which Lamia recalled the reasons behind her parting from Algeria is very revealing:

*It was a cocktail of reasons ... euhh ... It was the oppression of society, family oppression and the oppression of ... euhh ... What really triggered my leaving was the loss of hope, complete loss of hope, after I lost my cousin.*

This quotation suggests that before the assassination of her cousin, other events occurred that provoked her loss of hope. First, and maybe most significant for her, was social oppression; then, the oppression of her family; finally, the “complete loss of hope” that was related to the death of her cousin. The other implicit fact could be the confusion of the 1990s: to date, not even a proper definition of this period has been agreed on: civil war, a war against civilians or internal conflict.

Following Lamia’s opening statement about her reasons for leaving the country, it could be expected that her narrative would be about the circumstances of her cousin’s death and how it affected her emotionally. However, it seems to concentrate more on the fact that she could not find a job (prior to leaving Algeria, Lamia in fact held two different posts, as an English teacher, a position she was desperate not to lose, and as a translator for a private company) and then how she lost hope completely because of the escalation of violence. In fact, the violent assassination of her cousin could be an example of what Renos Papadopoulos (2007) calls the ‘devastating event’ that provoked her departure, a concept he uses in his work with traumatised refugees and asylum seekers in Europe. Papadopoulos explains that the discourse on the trauma of forcibly displaced people tends to emphasise the main ‘devastating event’ that forces people to flee, such as violence,

persecution, war or internal conflict. Although it is recognised that this event is usually the main cause of symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), earlier crucial experiences, which make up what Papadopoulos (2001, p.5) calls the 'phase of anticipation', are generally ignored. However, this phase may have been marked by suffering from discrimination and/or violence, both in the public and private spheres. Algerian women, for example, were subject to both collective and individual oppression, and the experiences related to this oppression were potentially traumatic. This is illustrated in Lamia's narrative: the assassination of her cousin is only mentioned twice, the first time just four minutes after her introduction. This indicates that something else, something deeper and more painful, made her lose hope:

*But to say when I understood why Algeria ... wasn't a country where I could stay ... It was when ... euhh ... I wasn't myself, when I wasn't allowed to be myself. When I was dismissed from my second job ... I was also dismissed from my first job as an English teacher.*

Lamia's story took on a melancholy tone when she said that she was not allowed to be herself; this was particularly the case when she was dismissed, because her sense of self was so strongly connected to her work. The strength of feeling in this statement renders the previous comments about losing hope following the assassination of her cousin less significant. It is very likely that Lamia's statement is an example of what Robert Jay Lifton (1991) calls 'dissociating' or 'turning oneself off' when experiencing something that is emotionally painful. This dissociation is an ego-defence process that often involves a kind of self-repression. Maryanne Loughry (2008, p.169) describes the traumatic experience as something that becomes encapsulated in the 'psychological world' of the victim. The degree of the damage resulting from this experience, therefore, depends on both external and internal factors: the extent of continual persecution in the public sphere and the emotional trauma the victim might have suffered since her childhood in the private sphere (Agger, 1994). Eugenia Weinstein and Elizabeth Lira (1987) emphasise the importance of considering the process of dissociation when seeking to understand trauma because the dissociative process is also an essential part of subsequent reactions to it. Loughry (2008)

explains that by dissociating the victim establishes a partial disintegration of her ego in order to avoid overwhelming anxiety, which would lead to a total breakdown. We will see later how Lamia was ready to die in order not to lose her job.

‘I wasn’t myself’ vs ‘I wasn’t allowed to be myself’ suggest two types of oppression, external and internal, that are most likely linked. This reminds us of Tovi Fenster’s (2006) feminist critique of Henri Lefebvre’s concept of ‘the right to the city’. In her critique of Lefebvre’s work, Fenster (2006, p.217) looks at women’s everyday lives and “their reflections regarding their sense of comfort, belonging and commitment to the city they live in”. Fenster’s work, which has important implications for the analysis of Lamia’s narrative, is based on the qualitative interviews she conducted with women in London and Jerusalem, and on the literature of citizenship that exposes discrimination against women when trying to access rights in different areas of their daily lives, from the private to the public. According to Mark Purcell (2003), there are two essential points that underlie Lefebvre’s concept of the ‘right to the city’: first, the right of all citizens to ‘fully use’ the urban space they live in, by working, earning, spending, walking freely, playing, and most importantly, feeling secure in their everyday lives and activities; and secondly, the right to participate in policy decision-making regarding the design of the urban space, as well as its management, maybe through an electoral process. Although Lefebvre recognises the right to be different as integral to exercising the ‘right to the city’, his critics argue that he overlooks differences such as gender and culture. Fenster (2006) argues that a dominant, homogenising power such as patriarchy shapes the ‘right to the city’, and that Lefebvre fails to challenge the different types of power relations affecting women’s right to use and participate in urban public space.

In her narrative, Lamia stresses how being dismissed from her job made her ‘lose herself’. Hence, it is crucial to know the reasons beyond the actual act of dismissal that brought this about. Crucially, without employment, she would be denied any ‘right to the city’. Added to this, her childhood experiences could also be linked to her feeling of not ‘being herself’. The oppression she experienced at the hands of her father and in her village helped to cultivate in her the idea that living in a big city would free her from these restrictions. As in most countries, in Algeria it is considered that the larger cities have a different social environment than rural small towns and villages, particularly when it

comes to women's rights and participation. But to gain this freedom, Lamia needed a job, because without a job she would have no means of survival. Although the Algerian government offered an unemployment allowance, the amount was very small, and women did not have access to local authority housing. The only way to stay in the city was to work. With the loss of her job, Lamia lost her sense of belonging to the city. Saying that she was not allowed 'to be herself' – first in her private and family space, then in her village community, and finally in the city – Lamia shows that she was denied the opportunity to access and use her citizenship rights. According to Fenster (2006), it is important to understand the full impact of the restrictions of the 'rights to use' both in private and public life.

There is a large body of literature suggesting that a person who experiences physical and psychological violence always loses a sense of self. Indeed, what follows in Lamia's narrative is her experience of sexual harassment when working for a private company, the last job she had before her departure to the UK:

*I applied for a job with a private oil company that was dealing with oil in the big city. Anyway, before I left that job, saying, "enough is enough", one of my superiors in the same [department] was trying to flirt with me, if you like. He was inviting me ... He was about 55 and I was 25 years old ... euhhh ... [A gesture intimating that this was not acceptable].*

If one of the key achievements of the feminist movement is that women are finally able to provide an exact political definition of what sexual harassment consists of, it is clear from such a case as Lamia's that this goal has not been met in all parts of the world, and particularly not in Algeria. What are the acceptable boundaries between flirting and sexual harassment? Flirting varies from one culture to another, even within Algerian society. Lamia is from a culture, in particular a village culture, in which a woman is not used to being, and is not allowed to be, in touch with men who are not direct relatives (as she explains in her narrative). She told me, for example, how her mother had to stay inside the house every day of her life and was not even allowed to open the door to the postman if her father was not at home.

To place Lamia in the Algerian context of the time, it is important to mention the widespread discourse against women in the workplace which flourished as a consequence of both the rise of the Islamist fundamentalists and the anti-feminist backlash in the west that influenced the so-called secular and democratic Algerian spheres. Lamia preferred to consider or refer to her boss's behaviour as 'flirtation', although she was still confused as to his motivation due to the age gap between them. She may have deemed it normal at first, or maybe tried to make sense of it by calling it 'flirtation' in order to persuade herself that it was indeed 'normal'. The instability and insecurity of working for a private company may also have placed her in a vulnerable position. It was a private company, set up in partnership with a British oil company: *"I had no proper contract – it was in between being freelance and having a contract; it wasn't a serious contract."*

In general, women almost never report sexual harassment to the police or any other form of authority, often through fear of being blamed for the harassment. According to Valentina Moghadhem (2010, p.114), "[i]n Algeria, the problem of sexual harassment was recognized as a part of the larger problem of violence against women, which had been the subject of a survey conducted by 'Collectif 95 Maghreb Egalité'". During my time at the National Commission of Women Workers, which was affiliated to the main Algerian union, the UGTA, one of the main issues we had to deal with, alongside other union colleagues and local representatives, was sexual harassment in the workplace. The highest number of complains came from the private sector, despite the fact that we represented less women in this sector. From 2001, the date of its creation, the commission worked in partnership with governmental and nongovernmental organisations, and human rights groups, to establish a call centre where women could ring in to report sexual harassment in their workplace. In March 2003, the commission requested that the Minister of Justice designate workplace sexual harassment a crime, and in November 2004, it was recognised as such and entered the Penal Code (Article 341). However, legislation to protect Algerian women from domestic violence and abuse was only adopted by the Algerian Assembly in March 2015, and the law was blocked for more than eight months before it was adopted by the Algerian Council of the Nation. Although women's organisations and lawyers welcomed its adoption, it remains the case that there have been no acts or official circulars



to ensure that the law is implemented (Salhi, 2016). Indeed, Soumia Salhi,<sup>7</sup> a feminist and head of the National Commission of Women's Rights in the Workplace, with whom I worked for years, declares that the adoption of this law is still waiting for the circulars to permit its implementation and remains sceptical that it will happen any time in the near future (Moghadem, 2011). Although the call centre is a great achievement for the commission, and for women workers in general, the lack of continuity in supporting women after they have made a complaint remains a concern; women must be empowered to use the call centre in order to have their voices heard and to identify the perpetrators (Moghadem, 2011).

Regardless of the conflict between the army and the Islamists, post-colonial Algeria has never been a state governed by the rule of law and the relationship between the authorities and citizens has always been dysfunctional, not to mention the fact that the Family Code places women in an inferior position. A woman who experiences sexual harassment, therefore, commonly suffers in silence, often developing a sense of self-recrimination based upon speculation over the way she was dressed or how she must have behaved in order to have attracted such attention. The opportunity to defend herself is impeded or is very difficult to implement, and this becomes a source of destabilisation (Thomas and Kitzinger, 1997). Her self-confidence is eroded, resulting in psychological disorders, self-denial, a diminished/non-existent sense of self, and the negation of her right to talk about her experience, to complain, even to exist. As such, sexual harassment is not a minor violence; it must not be underestimated (Thomas and Kitzinger, 1997).

In Algeria, sexual harassment in the workplace increased following the economic crisis that began with the end of the Cold War. The brutal restructuring of national enterprises and the capitalisation of the Algerian labour market during the 1990s caused the loss of thousands of jobs, and women were the first to be affected. Employment in public and government services, including education, health care and universities was frozen due to IMF directives, which only ended in 2000. Although the impact of restructuring and privatisation mainly affected men because the national companies that were privatised were very male-dominated, the high level of redundancies following the

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<sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.awid.org/fr/nouvelles-et-analyse/algerie-declaration-suite-ladoption-de-la-loi-contre-les-violences-faites-aux>

90-11 Labour Law put a burden on employment in government agencies. The restructuring imposed by the IMF austerity programme also opened national companies up to partnerships with foreign companies, placing pressure on and encouraging corruption in the labour market, further hindering women's access to employment, promotion and training. If an educated woman manages to be recruited in such a situation, it is likely that she will find herself in an exploitative environment in which she will have to take on a huge workload, differing in quality and degree to that of her male co-workers, regardless of her level of education. As Lamia said of her second job: *"They recruited me as a translator/administrator, if you want... And I was responsible for all kinds of translation from London and ... elsewhere."*

It is often the case that this kind of work environment, where men hold a directly hierarchical position over women, exposes women to sexual harassment. In this case, this man used his position to reduce Lamia to the dimensions of a sexual object and denied her the right to say 'no', the right to refuse 'flirtatious' propositions:

*He was buying me sandwiches, you know, and – for me – a colleague who buys sandwiches for you, you don't see it as bad, this is not a problem. But from time to time, he was flattering me, and there were some compliments that made me feel uneasy.*

The fact that Lamia did not complain or protest against her colleague's sexual harassment can be explained by a number of reasons: her insecure employment contract, as well as her ignorance of what sexual harassment is and of her legal rights in the absence of any union representation in her private sector job. Women are more likely to live with this harassment in silence or, at best, resign. Lamia carried on working until she was dismissed: *"He was not the big boss but [he was] important enough to decide on dismissing me. So one day, I had a phone call telling me not to come back – 'We don't want you anymore' – just like that."*

According to Alison Thomas and Celia Kitzinger (1999), sexual behaviour in the workplace can take many forms and the same behaviour can have different labels. Other investigators have taken the argument further to make a clear distinction between non-harassing sexual behaviour, direct sexual harassment and the sexualisation of the

workplace (Thomas and Kitzinger, 1999). Non-harassing sexual behaviour consists of relatively harmless, 'flirty' compliments, although they can be considered annoying by the person receiving them. These compliments may start to be labelled 'sexual harassment' when they are perceived as offensive and interfere with the woman's employment. In Lamia's case, the 'flatterer' had enough power to transform her working environment into a place of misery, and also a very embarrassing one. She may have developed other resentments by the time he ordered her dismissal. Again, it is important to recall here that during the 1990s the Islamist party, the FIS, had on several occasions publically terrorised women workers into giving up their jobs so they could be filled by men, the supposedly legitimate breadwinners of the family.

*"He was buying me sandwiches ... you don't see it as bad."* Lamia uses the word 'you' many times in her narrative. Here it appears to be an attempt to gain confirmation from me that she was right to accept the sandwiches, or maybe other proposals she has not named, although not some 'compliments' that gave her a feeling of discomfort. This shows how Lamia at first felt safe with an older man who may have exploited this feeling to try to abuse her sexually. Due to his age, she may have initially considered him as a male protector in that particular Algerian context. She was, after all, far from her traditional dichotomised patriarchal oppression/protection: her father and her village. Here, uncertainty and the untold story about what exactly happened appears "mixed with ambiguous emotions" in Lamia's mind (Agger, 1994, p.23). The colleague or 'old man' was trusted to be a member of the protective extended patriarchal society, and as such, he should have applied the patriarchal rules of the protector. However, instead he committed the "social transgression that has almost inconceivable consequences" in a society where only two states for females are socially acceptable (Agger, 1994, p.25): that of the child and that of the married woman. Living between these states, someone like Lamia, as a sexually mature female, is in constant fear of violation of the physical boundary represented by the hymen, a biological symbol of women's purity, a mark of her family's honour, and the only guarantee of finding a 'good' husband.

During the interview, the words "trusted him because he was an old man" express the mixed feelings of culpability and complicity that Lamia developed. From Inger Agger's (1994) point of view, the anxiety of feeling an accomplice in such a case increases

the degree of shame and thus the degree of traumatising. Lamia assured me that her main reason for leaving Algeria was not based on this particular incident. However, as seen earlier, she immediately started talking about it as soon as she had introduced herself.

### **Collective trauma: the experience of terror**

After telling me about her experience of sexual harassment, Lamia went back in time to when she finished her university studies and started looking for a job:

*I had already worked as an English teacher, and I was looking for a job in my field. ... It was very, very hard to find a job in the public education system, in a secondary school. In the end I found one, but it was outside the big city [laughs]. The academy gave me a job that probably no one else wanted to take. It was in Bengaa. Bengaa is near Kahouat el Mefti and all those areas ... You know, the area was well known for its high number of terrorist attacks. It was a really 'hot' area.*

Although it was hard, Lamia still found a job, revealing her determination to overcome difficulties. Here, Lamia brought me into her story – she wanted me to share her emotions when remembering that time, and she also wanted to check I knew the area she was talking about to ensure I would understand what was about to come up in her narrative. At this point, from having portrayed herself as a fighter who finds a job despite the immense difficulties, Lamia took on a more passive voice, trying to make sense of why and how she managed to find that job – she explains she only got this job because “no one else wanted to take it”, presumably because its location meant it would expose employees to a high risk of terrorist attacks. Her voice betrayed a sense of not deserving or being worthy of the post. So already at this stage she was lacking self-esteem, even before the experience of sexual harassment and the mark it left on her mental wellbeing. What followed in this part of her story, however, was a description of the terror during her time as an English teacher.

Lamia set the scene: “*I was travelling every day from the city. In fact, when I was working as a high-school teacher, it was the period when terrorism was at its highest peak, the 'hottest' time.*” In addition to the terror that affected all Algerian citizens

indiscriminately, such as bombs in public places and the shootings and massacres of entire groups of citizens, women suffered particular troubles, especially those who refused to veil themselves. The mothers, sisters and wives of members of the police, army or other state institutions were especially at risk, due to their relatives' position, but sometimes simply because they were women. Educational institutions and universities known to be female-dominated suffered the most attacks. Even before the cancellation of the elections, the FIS had won a majority in local elections, and in rural areas, such as the one where Lamia taught, women and girls were already under a great deal of pressure to conform in dress and behaviour to strict Islamic rules. The targeting and harassment of foreign language teachers, particularly those who taught French, was common. In reality, the threats levelled against these women had less to do with anger at a colonial hangover and more with installing an atmosphere of fear in order to force women to leave their jobs and evacuate the public space.

Lamia, however, showed she was determined to keep her job. She worked there for two years and did not leave until she was dismissed. She explained the difficulties she went through and the risks she took during the time she was working for the school: "*As I wasn't really allowed to keep my student accommodation, I was staying at my aunt's in the Casbah. It was really tough; even her sons were FIS militants. That was really tough.*" It may be that her aunt offered Lamia a place to stay rather than let her go back to the village. Possibly, she was showing solidarity with her niece as she knew that if Lamia went back she would lose even the limited freedom she had gained in the city. The aunt had come from the village herself and must have been aware of the harsh rules imposed on women and young girls there. Lamia told me later that her aunt was her father's sister, so she knew at first hand how strict he was with the women of the family. Added to this, the university campus did not allow Lamia to continue living there, and without this accommodation she was denied a 'right to the city'. The use of the word 'really' suggests that, despite the rise in violence against women on the campus, Lamia would have preferred to stay there if she had been allowed to, rather than with her family:

*It was very hard for me, you see. But at least it was a roof over my head. I was so grateful to [my aunt]. I send her gifts now from time to time, and when I go back to Algeria, I*

*always give her some money. She offered me a roof and never asked me for anything.*

Lamia's aunt lived in an area that was known as a FIS stronghold and possibly one of the most dangerous areas in the capital in terms of terrorist attacks. Lamia explained that even her cousins were FIS supporters, and described how hard it was for her to live there: *"It was 'hot'. They were walking on the street holding bottles of vinegar and handkerchiefs because the police were always passing by with teargas grenades."* Here, 'they' refers not only to her cousins but to everyone living in that area. Lamia had vivid memories of her cousins' behaviour, telling me of the way they used to protect themselves from inquisitions by the police or security forces. She wanted to make sure that I knew she was not part of it, that she had nothing to do with the violence or Islamism. In fact, she told me that she does not even 'do religion'. She also said that although she was not a member of RCD (Rassemblement pour La Culture et la Democratie), she agreed with its ideology of democracy and secularism, and that her cousins were aware of this.

Lamia lived with her aunt until she left Algeria in 1994. She never went back to the village. Hence, she was living in that area in Algiers throughout the time she was going through the difficult process of finding a job and travelling through very dangerous areas to work, as well as during her later experiences of sexual harassment and the further difficulties she encountered following her decision to leave Algeria and come to the UK. *"The house was [like] a full of bottle of vinegar. I didn't understand [why]."* Later in her story, Lamia explained how she and her aunt were not even allowed to watch TV, particularly if a debate around secularism was broadcast or if political leaders who opposed the Islamists appeared. Any discussion or debate around secularism was forbidden in the house: members of the RCD were considered 'apostates' who deserved to be killed. Raising her voice in imitation of her cousins, Lamia explained what happened if they came into the house and found her watching TV: *"Switch it off! Those [people] are Kuffar [apostates]. Don't listen!"*

After explaining her sense of not belonging to the place she was staying in, Lamia returned to her experience of working as a teacher: *"So the first week for me began when one of my students – she was a girl – was killed by a stray bullet. [That] tells you how 'skhouna el halla' the situation was."* The expression, *skhouna el halla* (the verbatim

translation is a ‘hot situation’: *skhouna* means a hot or torrid hell; *halla* is a situation, time or space) is a metaphor from the Algerian language, *Derdja*, used during the Black Decade to describe how dangerous terrorism was at certain times in certain places. This expression recurs several times in Lamia’s narrative as she narrated her day-to-day experiences:

*I attended the funeral of my female student during my first week of work! She was coming to school, there was a battle between the army and the terrorists, and she received a fatal bullet, shot dead. I remember it like it was today, [going to] the funeral...*

The ability to remember the funeral of somebody she may have only seen once is an indicator of the horror she experienced. Attending a funeral in the context of terrorism is painful in itself, but attending one of a young female student may have had even more significance for Lamia. Would she have gone if the student had been male? Lamia also wanted to emphasise the fact that it was common to attack female pupils either to discourage them from attending school or to force their parents to stop them studying. She continued:

*During the two years I was teaching there, whenever I was taking the register of attendance, I would hear: “Miss, he’s not here”, “Her dad was shot dead last night”, and “They came and took them”. You know all that? Half the class was living in the hottest areas.*

So, there were areas that were even hotter than ‘hot’; her students were in even more danger than she was. Lamia is also telling us with her use of the pronouns ‘he’, ‘her’ and ‘they’ that everyone was targeted, not only girls. Here, violence was generalised, and every morning there was a new terrorist attack, directly affecting everybody.

However, the employment in the school did not last:

*The job wasn’t even as teacher but as an assistant teacher. It was also only a replacement [post] and I didn’t have a [permanent] position. So one day, [despite] all the effort I put into that job and all the risks [I took], I was told to leave because someone else was coming*

*to take over.*

Lamia used the words ‘someone else’ either because she assumed that I would intuitively recognise the untold story behind her dismissal or because she did not really know herself why she was only taken on temporarily. Although she did not say if the person who took over her job was male or female, the likelihood is that it was given to someone who was able to pull strings. *Maarifa* (networking) was, and continues to be, a vital tool for accessing all kinds of services in Algeria, including local authority housing and health care, and women above all had difficulties accessing *maarifa* (Talahite, 2000). In a report published by the University of Virginia, Jonah Schulhofer-Wohl (2006) states that from 1993, the country was on the edge of bankruptcy and in the process of rescheduling its public debt of \$9 million in an attempt to boost the economy. At the same time, hundreds of public buildings, such as schools, workplaces and hospitals, were burned down by the GIA (the Islamist armed forces). As a result, regionalism, family connections and recommendations from a father or male relative became vital resources in the attempt to access increasingly limited employment opportunities or public services. Since Lamia’s father was against her staying in the city to work, however, it is unlikely that she had his approval or was able to ask him for help: “*My father was wealthy and well-known but he wouldn’t help ... Anyway, he thought I was staying there to study for a masters [degree].*”

Lamia returned again in her narrative to her father’s disapproval of her remaining in the city: as he was not against women’s education, he would only allow her to stay if it were to continue her studies. When, later on, she says, “[t]o me, the end justifies the means. Do I regret it? No”, she is showing that telling a white lie was a coping mechanism in her struggle against the oppression she experienced. It is often the case that educated Algerian women use morally dubious means to resist harsh patriarchal rules (despite the fact they often consider these ploys irrational and only used by their uneducated and powerless mothers). Ferial Lalami (2012), however, argues that even those women who appear the most powerless have a modicum of power within the private sphere, which they constantly battle to keep and extend. Lalami refers to Hannah Arendt’s concept, ‘the power of powerless’, and explains the hidden weapons used by Algerian women, such as cunning, lies and *shour* (witchcraft). Talking from exile, Lamia has no regrets about doing



what she had to in order to survive in Algeria and then leave the country, without telling me exactly what it was. Later on, she said: *“Because I was an educated woman, I refused to accept that I could not achieve [what I wanted by] using other [means]; I could [achieve] everything by myself.”*

Surviving terrorism, as well as being worried that her father might discover her lie at any time, was an extremely difficult experience, as Lamia explained:

*Imagine all of that ... Me, I was not sleeping at night. [Pause] One day I left their house at 5.30am – I had to leave at 5.30am to be on time for school at 8am, and of course there was no way you could be late or you would lose your job, unless of course you’re killed. So I left at 5.30am and that day there was a clash between the terrorists and the police. You know, the sound of bullets in my ears went: tatatatatata. I will never forget it. As soon as they stopped for a minute, I took my bag and left the house. My auntie whispered to me: “Where are you going”? I told her: “I’m going to be late for work.” Can you imagine? You are so close to death, but the only thing you think of is to be on time for work. So I made it, I went there, and how many times that bus was [forced to] deviate ... It happened so many times.*

Lamia describes here the general atmosphere of violence she was living in, the turmoil of her nights, and illustrates how distressed she was by the violence and yet how she remained resilient, brave enough to risk her life just to be on time for work. Stephen Joseph (2012) points out that it is very common that individuals in times of conflict or war develop a sense of invulnerability simply because they believe in their own agency. Although they may recognise that disasters occur to a large proportion of the population, they hold to a belief that these misfortunes will never happen to them.

For Lamia, that particular morning represented another close confrontation with the reality of terrorism and death; the sound of bullets that she said she will never forget is a sign that the event has left her traumatised. It was, for her, an event that involved the threat of death, a threat to the integrity of her physical self, which can be traumatising for anyone who experiences, witnesses or confronts such a situation (Joseph, 2012). Lamia reiterated her aunt’s support and the complicity between them is suggested by their

whispered conversation. Although she did not listen to her aunt's advice, Lamia recounted the event with intense feeling, encapsulating it in the sound of the bullets, which she imitated loudly.

With hindsight, Lamia now can hardly believe that she left the house, risking death, only to go to work. She will never forget this event or her fear. But she did it: she took her bag and left her aunt's house. Her resilience and determination to keep her job took her beyond the fear of being killed. There is a high probability that this event either induced in her or at least accentuated the development of symptoms of PTSD. Since the area where she was teaching was very dangerous, travelling to work on a daily basis must have augmented her level of stress, especially when the bus was forced to deviate from its route. It is not clear from the quotation what caused the buses to deviate, but Lamia seems to imply it was the army.

### **The recurring theme of violence**

Later in the interview, after speaking of other subjects, Lamia felt the need to tell me more about her experiences and the terror she had witnessed:

*One day I was walking down la Rue d'Ardu. I was going back to my auntie's, and suddenly we heard 'tatatatata', a gunshot ... It was an attack, followed by a big battle in the middle of the city. Oh my God, we panicked [raising her voice].*

Witnessing violence can have a severe impact on a person's mental well-being. According to Jan Seeley (2008, p.11), terrorist attacks are deliberately designed to provoke intense fear, shock and intimidation amongst a large number of people; their psychological effects are more harmful than a natural disaster, due to the fact that they are caused intentionally by other human beings. The bomb attack on 12 August 1992 at Algiers airport, for example, not only shocked the Algerian people, but also instilled in the entire population a sensation of continuing threat and fear. Although Lamia did not mention it, President Mohamed Boudiaf had been assassinated shortly before, on 29 June 1992, while addressing the public – live images of his assassination were broadcast into every home.

The decision not to censure these images was undoubtedly taken in order to warn and intimidate the population.

Although the exact date of the terrorist attack that Lamia mentions is not clear from her story, there is a high probability that it took place after these two events, which had already damaged Algeria's collective consciousness in many ways. Lamia said she was walking on one of the busiest streets in the city, known for its chic clothing boutiques, when suddenly what she had always feared happened. What follows in her narrative is a very detailed, intense description of a terrorist attack:

*We found refuge in the first boutique in front of us, and there was a woman, she was with her two kids, [and she was] panicking. She held one [child's] hand but the other one was outside the boutique [because] when the owner [let] us in, all the women [ran inside] and the owner closed the door. The poor woman, she managed to get in with only one of her boys. She was sobbing loudly and the man shouted at her: "Stop crying" [Lamia shouts, imitating the shop owner]. "Either you come in or [go] out. Don't go back to look for the other one." ... In a way, he was right, because if she had gone out, she would have received a stray bullet. We were lying down in the fitting room of that boutique ... 'tatatatata'. We stayed until everything had calmed down and we were safe. In the end, her child was in the boutique next door; another woman had taken him in with her, so he was safe.*

As soon as the man who owned the boutique saw or heard the terrorist attack, he reacted quickly, offering those on the street a place to hide. They were all women. When recalling the event, Lamia at first showed compassion and empathy towards the desperate mother who could only rescue one of her two children. Although she said nothing about her own feelings at the time, Lamia appeared affected by intense emotions, which I perceived to be a mixture of gratitude and anger towards the boutique owner, but in the end she appeared more grateful than angry because he had rescued them all from possible death. She remembered how the woman was sobbing, and more importantly, the sounds of the bullets, again repeating the noise loudly.

People choose which narrative to tell and which part to focus on most when retelling their experience of a traumatic event. Thus, it is very likely that the street was also full of men, but Lamia only mentioned the women; the only men she spoke of were their saviour, the shopkeeper, and the little boy who was left behind. It is important to recall that it was only after the 9/11 attack that the international community was made aware of the high psychological impact of a terrorist attack that appears to come out of nowhere (Seeley, 2008), and it was only after 9/11, the 7/7 bombings in the UK, and more recently, the attack on the satirical journal, *Charlie Hebdo*, in Paris, that the tragedy of Algeria has been recognised as a fight against terrorism.

Lamia put the stress on the distress and pain of the woman who left her child outside the boutique and on the solidarity displayed by the woman who saved the child's life. She paused a moment before carrying on with her story:

*The fear, and the loud sobbing of that woman, they remain in your ears and heart for years and years; you don't realise it when you are experiencing it, [when you're] in the middle of it. When it's 'hot' like this. But when you see other people here putting things so dramatically, you think: "Really? I survived more than that." You need to put everything in perspective, you just need to say to yourself, "Really?" I was one inch from death every single day, every single day, but it becomes the norm, you just have to survive.*

Here, Lamia is comparing the unforgiving trauma she suffered back home during a time of conflict with the ordinary struggles she goes through in her daily life today. This quotation indicates that Lamia may be suffering from some kind of post-traumatic stress. Nevertheless, she also shows her capacity for resilience, as well as exhibiting her agency. She transposes her experience in Algeria into the context of her redundancy in the UK; by comparing the inhuman conditions she experienced in Algeria with the problems a European woman might encounter in her daily life, she points out that what she experienced was more dramatic, and being able to 'survive' with some measure of psychological integrity demonstrates her strength of character. Once again, she reiterated how close to death she felt at the time.

Despite the strong emotions brought to the surface by reminiscing about this tragic event, Lamia still found it difficult to stop returning in her narrative to the inequality and discrimination she experienced as a woman, in tandem with her experience of terror. Speaking of her desire to leave behind the difficulties and traumatic events she experienced in Algeria, she declared:

*But if I was a man, my father wouldn't have minded me leaving the country. I wouldn't have had a problem getting a passport and visa. But because I was a woman, I had to fight. It was, on the one hand, the lack of security, and on the other hand, the fight against my family. You also have to fight for a job. You have to sleep with the boss or you lose your job. In fact, I did lose my job, and that was maybe the only reason why I lost it. Because I was not even told why.*

### **The psychological aftermath of terror**

Lamia was articulating her story well, giving the impression that it is not the first time that she was telling it. To me, there seemed to be two Lamias presenting two different narratives: there was the Lamia representing her asylum claim to the Home Office, whose policies are primarily based on a culture of disbelief, particularly if the claim is gender-related; and there was the Lamia who spoke to me as a compatriot, someone whose empathy and understanding she was trying to elicit. In general, trust is crucial if a woman refugee is to recount her experiences. In this case, the trust between us had already been established when Lamia invited me to her house and framed the conditions of the interview.

Lamia continued: *“As a woman, things are more complicated. You have to climb the steep hill of life, of society. There it is – all the reasons why I fled.”* At this point, I believed that she was about to start recounting her journey to the UK. I assumed that she had told me everything I needed to know about her reasons for fleeing Algeria, but she had not yet finished remembering what had affected her most:

*When I arrived here in the UK, every time I heard an ambulance [siren], I was convinced that it was a bomb. I was always on [red alert], [my] instinct [was] to run away. It's still with me, you know, that fear.*

Even after spending 25 years in the UK, the question remains as to whether Lamia, as recovered from her trauma. As she explains, “[w]hen I hear a siren, I re-experience the terror I felt in Algeria and the memories intrude into my daily life in the UK”. The extent to which this is the case is betrayed by the fact that even when telling her story from exile, she cannot move on, but keeps returning to the different events – sometimes private, sometimes public, both indiscriminate terror and the fear of sexual violence and the experience of oppression – that have traumatised her the most:

*I remember once I was walking down the street, and someone was walking behind me. [It seemed] to me that he was following me. Because, you know, in Algeria, as a woman, with or without terrorism, you are always followed by men, you know, ‘yetbelaouek’. And that has always been the case, even before the terrorism. You know all that. So, for me, that guy was one of these men, and I was convinced that he was holding a knife, because while I was walking I remembered that one day, near my university campus, there was a girl walking on the street and she was wearing a skirt, not very short – you know the shortest you can wear in Algeria, to your knees and that’s it – and there was a guy walking very closely behind her, and suddenly he slashed her legs with a razor. We were told it was because she wasn’t wearing a hijab.*

It is interesting to note that at the time of analysing Lamia’s narrative a national debate around the acceptable length of a woman’s skirt was taking place in Algeria following an incident in the University of Algiers’ law faculty, when a candidate for a law proficiency examination was denied entry by a security guard because her skirt was ‘too short’. The Algerian slang word, ‘yetbelaouek’, mentioned by Lamia translates verbatim as ‘they aggress you’. It is used for antagonistic situations, either when men try to pick up a woman or when they insult them if they consider the woman to have ‘invaded’ their territory –

that is, the street. For Algerian women, seduction loses its definition when it involves a stranger, it is then considered to be harassment.

I felt unable to interrupt Lamia at this point when she continued with a further account of her everyday experience of harassment and fear:

*One day, I was in a bus coming from Bezerga towards Algiers, and we were stopped at a checkpoint. Two soldiers got on the bus to check [the passengers]. The route was so ‘hot’ that there was one checkpoint after another. They came on the bus and looked everywhere ... There was a man sitting next to me, he was very old, maybe a peasant working in one of the fields around there. The soldier asked everyone to get off the bus except for the women – you know, all of that bullshit [nervous laugh] ... Then one of the soldiers told the old man, “Stay here, you’re too old, it’s fine”. Then another soldier came, looked at him, and spitefully gestured for him to get out. The old man had just started to explain that [the soldier’s] colleague [had] told him not to when he received a blow to his head from the soldier’s Kalashnikov ... yes, yes, an old man, I’m sure he was [not even] obliged to work at his age.*

This account of the routine brutality of the security forces in their fight against terrorism singles out Lamia’s narrative from those of the other women I interviewed: she is the only one who spoke of the abuses of the Algerian army in the same way as she did those of the Islamists:

*You see? I looked [hard] at that soldier – I was a witness – so he came to me, looked at me, and asked me brutally: “Where are you going? Give me your ID card.” I was so scared. I thought he was going to arrest me, you know. He started asking: “Where are you going? Why are you in this bus?” It was like an interrogation [session]. I looked at the soldier ... “Why? Why this injustice?”, [but] I didn’t say anything. Any minute, he could shoot you. They weren’t the terrorists, they were the army, but the way he beat that old man – unbelievable. I could only show [by my expression] my objection to how he was beating that old man. But any minute, he could have fired at us ... and they were the army, supposed to protect us, the people.*

Lamia wanted to show her anger at the soldiers who were representing the state and not supposed to harm innocent citizens. Mohammed Samraoui (2003) in his book, *Chronicle of Years of Blood*, quotes one of his superiors, addressing the subject of the fight against terrorism, as saying: "I am ready and determined to eliminate three million Algerians if necessary to maintain the order threatened by the Islamists." Acts such as the one Lamia recounted were carried out by soldiers or the police under cover of the state of emergency introduced on 9 February 1992, the counterterrorism decree of 30 September, and the curfew imposed on 5 December that same year. These provisions allowed members of the security forces to abuse their power with impunity when searching for terrorists, and the use of violence against unarmed civilians reportedly took place at many other checkpoints, with women often paying the highest price.

*I was telling myself: "What has [got into me?] Why have I poked my nose into this?" I looked at that soldier with a bad face. Oh, Latefa, if you could have seen the way he was beating that old man, just because he said, "Your colleague told me not to get out of the bus". He gave him a smack like that [demonstrating with her hand] to his head.*

On some level, Lamia regretted standing up for the old man because of the danger she placed herself in, but she strongly disapproved of what the soldier had done.

It was only in 1995, when Lamia had already left Algeria that the army began to gain control of the areas where the terrorists dwelt, such as the one Lamia was travelling to that unfortunate day. These were areas in which the FIS had won a majority in the elections, and many of the inhabitants sympathised with the insurgent Islamists, partly because they were often their siblings, children or members of their extended family. The security forces gained control over these areas only by means of brutal measures and extremely restrictive laws (Bedjaoui *et al.*, 1999). According to former colonel Mohammed Samraoui (2003), soldiers were authorised to kill any suspected Islamist, armed fighter or not, as they were regarded as potential recruiters of terrorists, at the very least providing them with logistical support. Between 1993 and 1995, therefore, dozens of people were killed on a daily basis, killings legitimised by one side as the 'fight against



terrorism' and by the other side as the 'fight for democracy'. Algerian people found themselves trapped between two conflagrations. Stories similar to Lamia's were very common at the time; many innocent people, including the elderly and pregnant women, were violently beaten or raped. It is also important to point out, however, that some former members of the ALN, the former national liberation army, declared that they were not prepared to fight in an internal conflict, killing their own people or facing the possibility of being killed by friends, neighbours or members of their own family (Bedjaoui *et al.*, 1999). Wahiba Khiari (2010) recounts in *Our Silence*, a novel framed by her own experience of the Black Decade, the experience of women and girls abducted, kidnapped and raped, often at false checkpoints set up by Islamist fighters dressed in army uniforms, graphically illustrating the high price women pay during times of conflict. As regards the particular event Lamia speaks of, however, she stressed that the check point was manned by Algerian soldiers.

The fact that she witnessed a member of the army beating an old man traumatised Lamia to such an extent that she compares it to 'torture'. Lamia supported a political ideology that opposed the Islamists and agreed with the cancellation of the electoral process. However, she also happened to live and work in these dangerous areas, and consequently she witnessed the brutality meted out by the security forces in such districts. To reinforce her account, Lamia invoked a popular joke of the time: "*Do you remember when we used to joke about it: 'If they are [terrorist checkpoints], we will say: "We are you", and if they are [security forces checkpoints] we will say: "We are us"?"*" The fact that Lamia recalls this joke reveals that from the moment her bus was stopped, she was in doubt as to whether it was the army or armed Islamists, and feared she would be kidnapped or even raped. This sense of apprehension can be traumatic in itself. It has indeed been reported by Habib Souadia (2006), a former security forces officer living in exile since 1995, that in 1993 soldiers were instructed to search and arrest women suspected of being associated with Islamist groups. This meant that all women living in or simply passing through 'Islamist areas' were considered potential suspects. The body searches allowed soldiers to take advantage of the situation, touching women inappropriately. Souadia reports that hundreds of rapes were committed by his former colleagues at such checkpoints between 1993 and 1995.

Lamia returned to the subject of the old man:

*I remember that poor man, he was holding a plastic bag containing his lunch, I thought his wife may have prepared that for him. I swear, he was holding his head in his hands, he was dizzy and sick. He looked at that soldier with pain in his eyes. And it is true that when you look back, you realise the scale of how bad things were, but when you are in [the middle of] it ... me, what I was more worried about that day was the fact that I was going to be late for work. I lose my job and then what? Back to the village?*

As Lamia reflects on the struggle she has had to go through to find a job, she also thinks about the old man's situation – his age and the fact that he was still having to work and provide for his family, only to be beaten by the soldiers. She speaks of the “pain in his eyes”. But, as she recalls, overriding all was her concern about losing her job, re-emphasising how vital it was to find work at a time of economic austerity.

*And they weren't even paying us well: 4,000 dinars a month [around £72] they were giving me. And sometimes, you go to the post office to get your wages and you find nothing. Being paid was like something big ... It didn't look like it was your money, for which you had worked really hard, it was like it was a bonus and they were doing you a favour. [At the post office] they give you the paper inside your ID card, and the guy calls your name, so everyone knows your business.*

Lamia shows how humiliating she found this absence of confidentiality. Having lived in the UK, she looks back on this practice as archaic and demeaning, trespassing on the individual's sense of dignity. As far as women were concerned, it could be even more humiliating. At that time, women who dared to work, in defiance of the Islamist agenda, were faced with an attitude of “it's only what you deserve” in the post office when they were handed an empty pay cheque, not only on the part of those who worked there but also other customers, as is evident in the way individual's names and financial status were broadcast. This reminded me of a similar situation I experienced myself: I had to approach an accountant in my workplace, a member of the FIS, because there was an error in my

wage slip. His response was something along the lines of “Madam, don’t bother, just throw it away. Next month you won’t be receiving a wage slip anyway.” This was following the first round of the elections, when it was clear that the FIS were likely to win and would undoubtedly follow through on their intention to introduce legislation banning women from working.

Lamia continued her story:

*Just to make you laugh: I left the post office, [to go] to my aunt’s where I used to stay. I didn’t like going to my aunt’s – God knows how much I hated going there! I was walking down the rue D’Isly to get to Tafourah. I had no money, and I was depressed, let me tell you. I can’t even explain how depressed I was. And then a young man started following me: “Miss! Miss! I want to speak to you. I’m the son of a good family (‘wld familia’). I want to marry you.” (Lamia laughs hysterically)*

Lamia’s state of mind was so low that she assumed the young man had somehow figured out her situation and was trying to take advantage of her vulnerability. In reality, of course, it is unlikely; he was simply trying to find himself a wife, as in Algeria it is commonplace for men to approach, even harass, women on the street. Lamia, however, assumed that the young man was asking for her hand in marriage as a solution to her problems. When women marry in Algeria, they are supposed to become the responsibility of their husband, at least economically. As long as a woman is secure, compatibility in terms of social class, education or mindset is of little account; any problems she might have in the relationship are not deemed worthy of consideration. Clearly, regardless of her lack of economic security and the terror engulfing Algeria’s streets, Lamia wholeheartedly rejected the mentality that sanctioned the idea of getting married for the sake of obeying social norms.

*And then, without realising – I didn’t know that I had so much anger in me – I did this to him [swinging her fist and laughing]. Imagine: a man punched by a woman! I left and walked off, scared that he would follow me. I was surprised that the guy didn’t follow me and punch me back. Imagine, I was in a state of deep depression. Do you think the only thing a woman is looking for is to get married? With somebody from the street?! Oh my*

*God, you know, I couldn't believe that I was strong enough to bring down a man. "You realise the despair I am in and you tell me that the only solution for me is to marry an unemployed man [hanging round] on the street?"*

Lamia was proud of having punched the man in the face. She said that the energy came from the fact that she also despised him. Lamia had escaped a domineering father and had no intention of ever going back to living under male domination; she wanted a life free of the patriarchal rules she had escaped. Her only aim was to work hard and save enough money to flee the country. She considered herself an educated, liberated woman; however, she believed her despair and vulnerability must have been visible in her expression, giving the impression that she would agree to marry this man, who was probably unemployed and certainly not on her educational level, who dared to propose to her. But as Lamia was so surprised that he did not hit her back, her anger towards him dissipated.

### **Terrorism and women's oppression**

Lamia told me how she felt particularly brave in the incident described above, claiming that this strength is a part of the female character in the face of targeted violence:

*For me, personally, I think it was much more difficult for women because, as a woman, you are not supposed to be outside, and terrorism was an opportunity to show more hatred and spite towards women. It was there already, you know, the need to control, the need to bully, the need to undermine women. And then there it was: the opportunity was there.*

Thus, for Lamia, terrorism was an opportunity to exert more violence and hatred towards, and control over, women. It is generally recognised that the politicisation of gender always occupies a key place in any national or international conflict. Women are not only crucial for the biological reproduction of the members of a collectivity and its boundaries, but they also play an important role in its ideological reproduction as transmitters of its culture (Yuval-Davis, 2000; Brah, 1996). This vulnerable position means they are often the first victims of political, economic and social repression. Agger (1994, p.4) explains: "Anything can happen if women leave their houses, move out into society and the public

spaces, speak out and become visible, if they invade men's territory, bring[ing] disorder and impurity into society”.

Algeria is possibly one of the most androcentric societies in the Middle Eastern and North African region. As explained in the literature review, the dictatorship or '*le pouvoir*' ('powers-that-be'), which took over the country following the Algerian war of independence, relegated women to the status of subordinate citizens, implementing a family law that categorises women as minors throughout their entire life (Lalami , 2012). Nevertheless, this did not dissuade women from fighting to transgress these boundaries and access citizenship, despite the violence they often faced on the streets. Both the regime and its political opponents, particularly the Islamists, also believed that women can be used as a ladder by their opponents to maintain or access power, and they became victims of the organised violence perpetrated by all sides in the conflict. Those women who were publicly visible either because of their work or their political activism were seen as a threat to masculine territory, a challenge to male political power. Lamia, therefore, sees the escalation of violence during the Black Decade as simply another opportunity for men to aggressively force women to vacate the public sphere, to leave the streets.

Despite this, many Algerian women carried on working and studying during the Black Decade. In her speech to the 2014 International Women's Congress held in Algeria (which I attended and cited in Chapter ), sociologist Fatima Oussedik explained that in 1962, following independence, women only occupied two percent of the Algerian labour market. By 2014, however, that number had risen to 67 percent. Oussedik confirmed that the curve remained constant even during the Black Decade. Regrettably, I could not access any statistics for that period despite two trips to Algiers, where I visited the Ministry of Higher Education, the offices of the main trade union, the UGTA, and the Algerian Research Centre of Economics and Development (CREAD), for which Oussedik works. There is very little research or documentation on that particular period of Algerian history, and what is available invariably overlooks the experience of women.

Lamia continued her narrative:

*So even if it was hard for men – ok, fair enough* [she shakes her head as if disagreeing with herself]. *They killed more men than women perhaps* [she indicates that she is not sure], *but women always had a raw deal when it came to violence.*

There is a contradiction in Lamia's emotions and beliefs here. On the one hand, she expresses her sympathy towards the men who have been killed in the conflict. Her body language and her last sentence, on the other hand, reveal her certainty that women were the main target. Talking from exile, Lamia is trying to make sense of what really happened 25 years ago. She knows that even previous to – and regardless of – the internal conflict at the time, women in Algeria have always had to face violence. Her contradictory statement is a reflection of the dichotomy in the private/public sphere, in which the recognition of violence against women is often connected to self-blame. This sense of shame can come from the simple fact that even talking about menstrual pain is not permitted in the majority of Algerian families because it is thought to place young girls in weak positions vis-à-vis their brothers – although this may also be the case in many other cultures, it is usually for different reasons. They are therefore obliged to hide their pain with a mixed feeling of pride and complicity with the established patriarchal rules transmitted by their mothers. In the case of rape or sexual assault on the street, it is also very common to place the blame on the woman, citing her way of dressing or her behaviour. It is important to note in this context, Lamia's later experience of the asylum process in the UK and the refusal to recognise her as a political refugee as her claim was 'only' based on gender-related violence.

In Algeria at the time, the struggle to survive and to counteract terrorism appeared to take priority over the fight for women's rights (Lalami, 2012). It was at this point that the Algerian feminist movement split into two main groups: those who continued to believe that the main enemy of women's rights was the regime, including its security forces, and those who supported the cancellation of the electoral process (*ibid.*). Djamila Belhouari-Musette (2006) gives a further account of the feminists' clash during the Black Decade, claiming that Louisa Hanoun, one of the most respected feminist leaders in Algeria and a role model for many women during the 1970s and 1980s, betrayed Algerian feminism. Hanoun was the only woman political prisoner under the post-colonial regime

of the 1970s, and as well as being the president of the womens' rights organisation, the AEDHF (Association Egalité des Droits Entre Homes et Femmes), she was also the only woman to lead a political party, the Worker's Party (a Trotskyist organisation). Following her declaration against the cancellation of the electoral process, Hanoun continued to play a prominent political role; she signed the Saint Egidio's Platform in 1995, at a time when terrorism was at its height and the GIA had much blood on its hands. The platform was seen by its organisers as an attempt to end the conflict, calling for the reinstatement of the democratic process and an independent investigation into human rights abuses against those FIS members who had been elected. However, the presence on the platform of Islamist leaders who publicly claimed responsibility for bomb attacks and the assassination of innocent citizens and intellectuals made it unacceptable to the Algerian state. Hanoun, therefore, lost her credibility as a feminist at the same time as many Algerians of the Islamist tendency claimed her as their own. This is only one small part of the struggle within the feminist movement at the time (see the literature review in Chapter One). Lamia's last statement simply reflects the sense of schizophrenia dominating the situation.

At this point, Lamia returned to recounting how many lies she told her father just to be able to stay in the city, suggesting that she may well have fled Algeria partly as an act of a rebellion against his authority:

*Even on holiday, when I was a student, I was always inventing something for my father, like re-sitting exams in the summer [laughs]. I never had to re-sit, of course, it was only an excuse for not going home .... [W]hen I finished my studies, I never wanted to go back to the village. The idea of going back to the village was impossible. The village meant living under the same roof as my father. You go in and out under his watch.*

Hence, it becomes clear that perhaps Lamia's main reason for fleeing Algeria was to escape her father's control and the dictatorship of the politics of gender that discriminates so greatly against Algerian women. Freedom is one of the most essential prerequisites for a human being's happiness, and Lamia seems to have led an unhappy life in Algeria, experiencing a very controlled childhood, until she left for university. In general, as Nawal

El Saadaoui's (2015) work shows, the oppression of women in the Middle East could be said to start from birth. "*There was no room for me to speak,*" Lamia said very quickly at this point in the interview, raising her voice when she mentioned the idea of returning to the village and the difficulties she endured under the yoke of her father's authority. However, once she moved to the city, she was faced with other forms of fear and terror:

*When they killed my cousin, I told [my friend] Assia: "I'm leaving. How, where, I don't know." All I knew was that I had one goal: leaving the country. The UK was my destination. So I ended up getting my visa. I left. I confronted my father, and when I told him I was going, I think he lifted his hand to hit me – I think he was going to beat me [in a very low voice] – but anyway, he lifted his hand and he told me: "How you dare you?"*

Lamia did not mention where or when the meeting with her father took place, but clearly it was after she received her visa for the UK. Her description suggests a confrontation in which her father was, at least physically, more powerful and ready to beat her. Although she expresses a feeling of humiliation, Lamia also wants to show that in reality it was she who was in the most powerful position due to the fact that she was holding a UK visa. This may have given her the strength to confront her father. It is well documented that obtaining a visa to any country was next to impossible in Algeria at the time, as 'Maya', another participant in this study, shows:

*When the threatening letter from the GIA arrived, because I am half-Algerian, half-French, I went to the French Consulate to organise our departure. It was in May 1994, and guess what?... all those who were given visas were veiled or bearded.*

Whether Lamia's father beat her or not was not the point; it was more the fact that he lifted his hand to her. Recounting this action was enough to summon up other traumatic memories, and a long and uneasy silence settled in Lamia's living room. I thought she was going to end the interview, but instead she stood up and said: "*Let me make another coffee, so I can tell you the rest of my story, if you still want to hear it.*" To which I answered, yes please, and this time we should speak more about the journey to the UK.



## **Chapter Five: Fragmented Narratives of the Black Decade (Part 2)**

### **Lamia's Case Study – Migration, the 'Imagined Homeland' and Diasporic Consciousness**

#### **Introduction**

The following chapter comprises the continuation of Lamia's narrative, recounting her journey into exile. Her experiences, although necessarily unique, nevertheless encapsulate in many crucial ways the difficulties women face when confronted with a 'gender-blind' asylum process. After relating her struggles to establish herself within a new environment, negotiate a new identity and reconstruct her damaged 'sense of self' after the traumatic experiences related in Chapter Four, Lamia's story concludes with her desire to come to terms with her past, using her new, more politicised understanding of the circumstances in her homeland. The analysis of this part of Lamia's story allows us to explore the impact of political, state-driven 'reconciliation' in Algeria itself, as well as the question underlying this thesis of whether a sense of solidarity, and consequently a diasporic consciousness, could be said to exist among this group of highly skilled and educated Algerian women migrants.

#### **The migration process**

##### *Reaching the UK*

When Lamia returned with more coffee, she began to speak of her experience of migration:

*OK, I wanted to come here to study in Leeds University; to study, you know? But because I had no money, when I arrived here, I worked as an au pair. It's when you arrive that you realise that it's not that easy, not as easy as you think, you see. It's just another set of challenges.*

Lamia had mentioned earlier that her father was not against her studying; in fact, he sent her to study in Algiers University. Now, in her eyes, she was simply going to another place with the same purpose. Was she trying to convince herself that her intention had never been to oppose her father? Although the UK was not her destination of choice but,

as she revealed, imposed by chance circumstances, Lamia was connected to the country through her knowledge of the language and her last job before leaving Algeria as an English translator for a private company. Although she intended to continue her studies, on arrival she discovered yet “another set of challenges”.

I asked if she had any friends or connections in the UK before she arrived:

*No, no. It's very funny how I ended up here. It was through [another Algerian] who was already living in London ... She had just had a baby girl – she was married to an English guy – and she wanted an Algerian au pair. She wanted to get back [in touch with Algerians] because she felt isolated. She contacted her brother in Algeria, and her brother contacted Malha, another woman ... because Malha had advertised in a newspaper [for a job] abroad. So he [the brother] told her, right, you want to go abroad and my sister in London is looking for an au pair ... But because she [Malha] wasn't ready, as she had not yet spoken to her parents ... she told me about it.*

Lamia found the way she ended up in the UK amusing, showing a certain amount of satisfaction with her life in the country; she expressed how glad she was that her friend told her about the opportunity. One of the purposes of this research is to explore the existence of networks and solidarities amongst highly educated Algerian women who fled the terror of the Black Decade, and to interrogate the assumption that Algerians do not maintain diasporic connections. Lamia's story caught this research off-balance because she was the only one of the participants who demonstrated that this solidarity exists to a certain degree: without it, she would not have been able to stay in Algiers (due to her aunt's generosity) or travel to the UK (thanks to her friend's thoughtfulness). Lamia was first offered support and solidarity by her aunt and then by a friend, who gave her the opportunity to realise the objective that had seemed to her like “climbing Kilimanjaro”.

At this point, I quickly took the opportunity to ask what type of visa she had been awarded on entry to the UK.

*Yes, of course, I came with a visitor's visa and then I overstayed. The most important [thing] was for me to 'put my feet here', as Fellag said, you know? [a big laugh, we both*

laugh together]. *When I arrived, I went to the lady who [wanted] to recruit an au pair – actually she met me at the airport – and I went to work for her.*

Lamia had now arrived in the UK with a visitor's visa, usually granted for a period of six months. The Home Office has a list of countries whose subjects can be granted visas to work as *au pairs*, but this does not include Algeria. Lamia did not say who had sponsored her visa. The 'of course' here is to stress the fact that she came to Britain legally, possibly so that I do not regard her as someone who has transgressed the law. Women face gender-specific hostility when they decide to flee, and very often a woman's journey to safety is obtained by offering sexual favours. If this was so in her case, Lamia decided not to speak to me about it.

An interesting fact here is that Lamia mentions the Algerian playwright and comedian, Mohamed Fellag, a writer of satirical monologues. Fellag, who is originally from Lamia's region, Kabilya, left Algeria during the same period as she did. Mireille Rosello (2010) explores the different types of tactics used by Fellag in his way of writing and addressing his audience, explaining that his type of humour was a very powerful antidote to the general sense of desperation in 1990s Algeria. "For Fellag, laughing is a strategy, the reparative energy that enables him both to confront the unbearable and offer his audience a way out of despair" (Rosello, 2010, p.29). However, in 1995, during one of his shows in Algeria, a bomb hidden in the women's toilets exploded and this was enough to persuade him to take the route into exile. Lamia's quotation was taken from a play in which Fellag recounts the difficulties that Algerian migrants faced in trying to obtain legal status in Europe at the time, but his humorous words also show the *savoir faire* of Algerians, their determination to succeed despite the obstacles.

Lamia mentioned that the Algerian woman she worked for was feeling isolated and wanted her child looked after by someone from the same culture. A section in the literature review in Chapter One shows how migrant women reconstruct new identities. It appears that how they do so often depends on the country of migration; as far as Algerian women are concerned, the experience of those who fled to France appears to differ greatly from those who migrated to other countries. This is illustrated by the words of 'Faiza', one of the participants in this research, who now lives in France: "*To me, France is my*

*second country; all of us here feel like they haven't really migrated but only moved, you know, like when you move house.*" (It is important to note that my interviews in France took place before the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, and I did not have time to re-visit my fieldwork in Paris to investigate whether this attitude has changed.) This sense of feeling at home is probably due to the postcolonial ties between the two countries, but also to the fact that there is a big Algerian community already well established in France. Women do not feel the sort of isolation Lamia mentioned in the case of her employer.

Lamia therefore managed to enter the UK and then overstayed her visa; it was only at this stage that she became 'illegal'. However, for her, it was a small price to pay to escape the horror she experienced in Algeria. It is usually at this point, however, that the disillusion begins for many people caught in a similar situation, without administrative status, after they reach 'Fortress Europe'. Even more dangerous than the disillusionment are the psychological implications for a woman who overstays her visa, not only because she lacks the status that will allow her access to employment, housing, health care and other services, but also because she runs the risk of being detained and deported. Lamia, however, wanted to stress again what she endured in Algeria, so that I could better understand why she chose to place herself at risk of deportation: for example, the fact that in Algeria she was not even allowed to have a passport without her father's permission:

*Wait, wait, let me tell you first about how I got my passport. For me, it wasn't possible to get it 'au bled' – in my village – because everyone who works for the local authority there knows my father. It's so small. My father never allowed us to travel to Tizi Bahbah and the big cities. He [always] used to drive us. So if I went to Tizi Bahbah on my own, someone could easily say to him: "Aha, I've seen your daughter today", and then it's all over for me. So I made my passport [application] in the big city, although I wasn't a resident and my auntie couldn't [apply for] a residence paper for me because the house wasn't in her name.*

As mentioned earlier, certain dominant social and religious-based paradigms in Algeria are used to justify the denial of full citizenship to women (Lamarene-Djerbal, 2006). Despite the official postcolonial rhetoric of the Algerian Constitution, which claims to

follow a republican model, guaranteeing universal access to citizenship, there is an ambiguity that is clearly illustrated in the Family Code implemented in 1984. 'Ferroudja', another participant who now lives in France, says that after the death of her husband, despite the fact that she had been known as a political activist, everyone in the city where she lived watched her every move and then reported back to her 19-year-old son on all the places she visited: "*The situation became unbearable, so I left.*"

The family law was based on patrilineal rules, ignoring the changes that were happening in Algerian society, including the increase in women's employment in the public sphere. Instead, it further consolidated the already oppressive laws against women: legislation banned women from leaving the country unless accompanied by a male guardian or holding written authorisation signed by a male guardian (Lalami, 2012). Although such authorisation was not needed to apply for a passport, it was necessary to provide proof of address, which Lamia could only obtain from her father because she did not have a place of her own. Thus, she had to endure yet another stressful episode during her pre-departure period:

*I knew no one else ... I was at the end of desperation, you know. I can't even describe the despair I was in, I swear, Latefa ... I was asking myself how many more obstacles will I have to face? Any normal person wouldn't have had an issue with her father, but I did, you know. Because any normal person [who wanted to leave] would probably have the agreement of [their] parents; they might not be happy [about it] but at least they would have agreed. Every single thing was turned into an impossibility. Every time I got something out of the way, there was something else.*

Lamia expresses the acute sense of isolation she was feeling at the time. She told me later that, out of her whole family, only one of her sisters knew about her project to leave, and no one apart from her father was able to give her the proof of address she needed in order to apply for a passport. Indeed, it is very common that houses are registered only in the name of the male members of a household: fathers, husbands or brothers. In any case, Lamia knew no one else in her family or village who could help her without having to confront her father.

It is interesting to note the relative invisibility of her mother and her role in the family in Lamia's narrative. In her work on Algerian women fighting against the *sharia*-based Family Code, Lalami (2012) remarks that when she was collecting narratives from Algerian feminists, the role of the mother within the patriarchal family was never raised, in contrast to that of the father. According to Lalami, the mother is not mentioned when issues of feminist consciousness arise because either her consciousness is hidden or considered self-evident, or because her hidden forms of resistance or power should not be spoken about or revealed. Lamia, however, did mention her 'parents', suggesting that her mother was also a part of the obstacles she faced before she left the country. This may suggest that her mother was herself opposed to Lamia's project of leaving Algeria: it is often the case that women in rural areas in Algeria do not believe in female empowerment, thinking of it as a form of manipulation inherited from colonial times.

Lamia did not want me to think that she was exaggerating her despair; however, she also wanted to stress her determination. She was also preparing me for what was coming next in her narrative: she wanted me to know that she was not a normal person, that her situation was not normal, and due to this she had been forced to resort to 'abnormal' or 'immoral' means to obtain her passport:

*And so, I met someone [a man]. It was pure chance. I was going to ... I can't remember where ... It was very hot and I had no money, so I started hitchhiking ... yes, I did, in the city! So, someone stopped [his car] and I went with him.*

Lamia adopted a stronger, more assertive voice when recounting this situation, as if she needed me to condone her transgression of what was culturally acceptable in Algerian society – to convince me that it was vital for her to go with this man if she wanted to seize the opportunity to leave the country. It is interesting to see the use of the phrase "went with him" rather than "got in his car", which suggests that she may have met him again. At this stage of the interview, I was very much involved in Lamia's story, and without realising what I was doing, I asked her: "Were you not scared of going with someone you don't know? I mean, there were plenty of terrorists and other dangerous people around at the time." To which she replied gently: "*You know when you are in a situation where ...*

*Me – worse happened to me. Like, one day, I went in a car with someone who [turned out to have] stolen the car, and the police stopped us.”* Lamia points to the difference, as she sees it, between the act of getting in a stolen car and her freedom to simply accept the offer of a lift. This was not the first time that she had hitchhiked, something she did not consider wrong in itself, but in Algerian culture when Lamia got into a car with an unknown man she had crossed a patriarchal red line.

At this point in the story, knowing the insecurity of women living in Algiers and its environs at the time, facing the threat of kidnapping, abduction, rape or murder, I had to acknowledge Lamia’s great courage in hitchhiking. Indeed, according to *An Inquiry into the Algerian Massacres*, edited by Youcef Bedjaoui (1999), 3,700 women were killed between 1992 and 1998, although prior to November 1996 most of the news reports did not provide statistics of victims according to gender. Mokrane Ait-Larbi (1999, p.101), an Algerian lawyer, politician and advocate for human rights, together with other lawyers and human rights activists, published a report that recorded that at least 435 women were killed between November 1996 and December 1998 alone, of whom at least 149 were abducted and raped before being killed – in fact, in most cases, the kidnapped women were found to have been raped before they were murdered. For instance, on 24 October 1997, the bodies of ten women were found at the bottom of a well in Bentalha where a massacre had taken place a few weeks earlier. Other reports state that many women who either disappeared or were kidnapped during the Black Decade were kept as sex slaves; unfortunately, no statistics are available to verify these claims (Ait-larbi *et al.*, 1999, p.101).

Lamia, meanwhile, continued her story, saying:

*But this was an old man. Anyway, I would have gone with anyone. He didn’t have [pause] ... he wasn’t [pause] ... so I told him my story. It was like God has sent him to me because, really, what’s the worst that can happen to me? When you have no money, no support, no security, nothing, who cares? You really think I was worried about my security or being killed? If anything, the killing was there every day anyway.*

For Lamia, as long as the man was ‘old’, he was to be trusted, in the same way that she trusted her former superior in the company where she experienced sexual harassment, with the difference being that this man helped her and did not betray her trust. Lamia attempts to justify her act by emphasising her desperation – she was not in a position to let the opportunity pass her by. Although she did not divulge any details about how this man helped her, by saying “God sent him” Lamia made it clear to me that it was acceptable for her to take his offer of help. In the chronology of her narrative, Lamia at this point had not yet experienced the sexual harassment she told me about earlier. She hesitated in recounting what encouraged her to take the decision to accept this man’s offer, trying to make sense of why she defied the social norms. The silence in between her sentences revealed her hesitation when describing both her own feelings and how she viewed the man: a man old enough to be her father. In any case, Lamia felt she had no other choice.

In some areas of Algeria, if a woman goes out in public, she needs to be shadowed by a man. If she has to sort out administrative papers, for example, a male guardian (father, husband, brother or son) will accompany her. ‘Ferroudja’ explains:

*When my husband was alive, I was an activist both in my [local] association and political party. Everyone in the city use to look at me with respect. But once my husband died, I became [simply] his widow, because in Algeria you are always described as the wife of ..., the daughter of ..., the mother of.... One day I called our regular plumber to fix my sink. He told me that he was sorry he could not come until my son got home. Then, you feel the humiliation.*

Although Lamia’s and Feroudja’s circumstances were very different, they felt the same sense of humiliation, simply because of their gender. According to Lamia, this man appeared almost providentially at the moment she was feeling most humiliated, in despair, denied paternal support and with no other male in her life. She stresses she had nothing left to lose, apart from her life. I interpret this to mean that she already had a ‘bad reputation’. Lamia does not describe how this man helped her, but somehow he managed get her a passport and visa. It was perhaps this part of the narrative that Lamia did not wish her husband and son to hear. The worst that this man could have done is to kill her.



In any case, the worries about being killed were present every day and everyone was a target. This is well illustrated in what followed in her narrative:

*I remember that we were told: if you receive a bullet, it will take ten seconds before you start feeling it, and then you die. This is what we were told. You see the fear they [instilled] in us? So when I was walking, I constantly told myself that I may have received a bullet [without realising] and I was going to feel it in ten seconds, and then I would die. It was a bizarre sensation – the feeling was very bizarre. Because you tell yourself [pause] ... when you pass by ‘dodgy’ places sometimes, because you never know, it used to happen very suddenly: ‘tatatata’.*

Lamia raised her voice and became very nervous when recounting this event. The ‘we’ here certainly represents the entire Algerian population. The authorities wanted to instill fear in anyone who dared to go out in the streets in such areas. The situation during this time, between 1992 and 1994, was confusing for everybody. Algeria had been placed in a state of emergency that was only lifted after the riots in December 2011, when the regime feared the spread of the Arab revolutions, and many large cities in Algeria, including the one where Lamia was living, were under curfew between 11pm and 6am.

Lamia sensed, at this point in the interview, that I was reliving past emotions, asking myself, how do people carry on from day to day living with such apprehension and fear? I realized the extent to which I was connecting and identifying with Lamia’s story. I felt that what she was describing was similar to my own experience and to that of the other women I met during the course of my research. The interview, in this sense, was taking the form of an auto-ethnographic narrative of women who survived the atrocities of the Black Decade. For example, Lamia’s imitation of the gun – not the only time she imitated the sound of bullets being fired – suggesting a vivid memory of what the sounds represent: the fear induced by being in the vicinity of sudden death. I recognised this sense of imminent danger, which I experienced most vividly at the time of the births of my first two children. With my first baby, who was born in September 1995, the labour started at 4am during the curfew, and as there was no way that I could get to hospital or call an ambulance, I had to wait until it was over. My second child was born in the summer of

1997. The labour started much earlier than my doctor expected, and earlier in the evening. I could not wait until morning, so my brother took the risk of driving me to hospital. My fear that we could be killed at any moment (along with my unborn baby) was at its highest during that time. However, despite these unbidden memories, I tried my best to remain detached and keep to my role as the ‘researcher’. As for Lamia, she was also reliving a very traumatic feeling, one outside the normal range of human experience: expecting to receive a bullet at every ten-second interval, the sense of being extremely close to death yet somehow continuing to survive.

#### *Arrival in the UK*

When Lamia grew calmer, I decide to guide her back to the point in her narrative when she had started speaking of her experience as a new arrival in the UK.

*Yes, when I arrived here, I worked as an au pair for six months... euhhh, and I wasn't in touch with any other Algerians. Maybe because I was living in Kingston, where there aren't so many ... And then I made contact again with Louisa, who came from Algeria at the same time as me – she was working at a bakery here. This was after I left my job as an au pair because the lady I worked for stayed at home and started looking after the child herself.*

Lamia, as is the case with many migrants, had surmounted enormous difficulties to get to the UK, and had very high expectations of what she would find, particularly in relation to respect for human rights. The term ‘Fortress Europe’ held very little meaning for her. It is precisely for this reason that migrants often do not at first recognise their negative experiences as such. So, Lamia finds a logical explanation for her dismissal, and prefers to present it as if it were her own decision to leave.

She suggests that she was not in touch with other Algerians because she was not living in the right area. A brief glance at the work of Michael Collyer, one of the few scholars to research the Algerian community in the UK, goes some way to explaining Lamia's experience of relative isolation from her compatriots. Collyer (2004) reveals that the Algerian community was estimated to comprise around 30,000 people at the time of

his research, and was mainly made up of men. He conducted his research with the help of refugee support services, refugee community organisations (RCOs) and immigration lawyers who work with the Algerian community in London, and his results are based on interviews he conducted with 30 Algerians whom he met through NGOs with access to migrant networks in the UK (Collyer, 2004). Unfortunately, due to the vulnerability of their clients vis á vis their immigration status, many of these organisations either do not keep records of their clients or release information on their nationality; in the best-case scenario, some organisations will provide information on age and gender. Hence, Collyer is only able to give an approximate figure as regards women, extrapolated from the fact that only eight percent of his interviewees were female. He admits, however, that the number of Algerian women in the UK may be higher as it could be the case they are simply part of the invisible migrant population. Up to 2004, when Collyer's research was published, Algerians in the UK were mainly concentrated in London, particularly around Finsbury Park (known as a 'Little Algiers'), Walthamstow, the location of the Algerian Refugee Council,<sup>8</sup> and Waltham Forest, where the Algerian Welfare Association<sup>9</sup> (AWA) was based, both of which organisations have, unfortunately, since closed. These areas were far from where Lamia was living at that time.

Collyer argues that the majority of Algerians, regardless of when they arrived in the UK, are highly qualified academically. There were in fact three waves of migration. The first comprised those who came to study in UK universities during the 1970s and 1980s, when the Algerian government offered scholarships to study abroad. Non-verifiable sources claim that 8,000 of these Algerians never went back and are now working in the UK and fully integrated into British society. A recent, although disputed, study was published by the Algerian Research Centre of Economics and Development (CREAD) showing that of all the highly skilled Algerians living abroad, only four percent are in the UK. Again, this figure does not give a breakdown of composition by gender.

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<sup>8</sup> The Algerian Refugee Council was established to relieve poverty and advance education amongst Algerian refugees and asylum seekers in London. The charity was registered on 1 April 1997, and was removed from the register on 19 August 2009.

<sup>9</sup> The Algerian Welfare Association was formed to help Algerian families, including assisting with children's homework; teaching them their mother tongue; organising activities such as trips, camping and sports; and giving advice regarding drugs and crime.

The second wave was mainly composed of refugees such as Lamia, who fled following the rising violence of the 1990s. Collyer mainly speaks about members of the FIS, who, due to the repression of the party following the cancellation of the democratic process which had resulted in their victory in the first round of the elections, automatically fell under Article 1 of the Geneva Convention and were granted refugee status. Finally, the third group was that of the '*harragas*' (literally, 'those who burn the frontier'), who risk everything to enter Europe illegally, often by boat. This phenomenon began in the late-1990s and is perceived as a significant challenge to European immigration policy today. It is difficult to estimate the real number of *harragas* in the UK and how many of them are Algerian. From my observation, however, there is a considerable number of highly skilled women amongst them who prefer to remain invisible.

Hence, it is common for Algerian women like Lamia to find themselves in a very isolated position. Lamia says that the contacts she made in Algeria and the information they gave her about finding a job in the UK were useful, but only temporarily. This experience is not necessarily specific to Lamia's case; according to the survey I conducted for this research and my observations during the fieldwork, as well as my own personal experience, there are no professional networks amongst Algerians living in the UK to which newly arrived Algerians can turn for information about the sort of support systems available. Lack of trust, even suspicion, among forced migrants from Algeria is also another factor that may have had an impact on Lamia's situation.

A feeling of isolation is common amongst refugees who flee internal conflicts, but there is a deep-seated reason for the particularly high level of suspicion amongst Algerians in London who claimed asylum in the 1990s. According to James Le Sueur (2010), there was a large division between different groups of Algerians at the time. On the one hand, there were former members of the FIS, whose asylum claims were grounded on the fact that they had been persecuted by the Algerian security forces. According to Le Sueur (2010), as well the head of the London-based British-Algerian Connection (ABC),<sup>10</sup> these former members of FIS who enjoyed refugee status and who were particularly concentrated in and around London's Finsbury Park area, openly celebrated the

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<sup>10</sup> I conducted the interview with the head of the British-Algerian Connection on 14 July 2015.

assassinations of intellectuals in Algeria. On the other hand, there were secular intellectuals and highly educated migrants like Lamia who had fled in fear of those very assassinations. Although this evidence was specific to London, the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris in January 2015 revealed that it could have also been the case in France, and potentially in other countries, although there has been no research into this issue.

Lamia's following statement, therefore, reflects her lack of a support network. Her arrival in London seems not to have been without difficulties:

*So I left that woman's house and went to live in Brixton, where I worked as an au pair again, this time for a Greek couple. First, I had a room, and then I lived for a few days with Louisa. She was the one who introduced me to the Greek couple. But one day the Greek lady told her: "Can you please tell Lamia to leave; I don't want her here anymore." I had nowhere to go and no one to go to. I spent my nights crying [once] again, as I was homeless, with no shelter and no right to work.*

After climbing 'Kilimanjaro' – to use Lamia's own metaphor – in order to get to her much-anticipated European haven, away from all her troubles, Lamia was overwhelmed by disillusion. She was now back to spending her nights crying, reminding her of when she used to live with her aunt in Algeria. At that time, her tears were caused by the difficulties she encountered living with her cousins and the daily fear of terrorism, but at least in Algeria she had a roof over her head – a fact she mentions several times throughout her narrative. Now, however, she no longer had a job or accommodation, and was effectively homeless and destitute in London. In the very short time she had spent in the UK, she had already lost two jobs, and more troublingly she had become an undocumented or 'illegal' migrant (to use the Home Office jargon). Although Lamia at this stage does not give any details about this period, it is likely that her visa had expired around the time she started working for the Greek family, which would explain her deep sense of despair; it could also be an explanation as to why this couple decided they could no longer house or employ her. When Lamia reached this point in her story, she lapsed into silence for a short time, obliging me to find the right words to move on with the conversation. I asked her: "I

understood that you had no problems with the English language? Could you not find another job?” Lamia answered:

*No, I couldn't. That's another story. Because I had no papers ... it was hard. The funniest thing is, for me, before I came to this country, my written English was perfect but I couldn't speak it, you see? So I took the Cambridge Proficiency in English exam. It was very easy for me. Then I worked in a restaurant as everyone did, just to have something to eat ... as a waitress and then as a chef. I was promoted.*

So Lamia found herself an undocumented migrant, banned from working. She told me, however, that Louisa, the friend she mentioned above, provided her with somewhere to stay for a few days. She also spoke of another Algerian woman living in London, a former journalist, who gave shelter to many of her compatriots – an act of solidarity amongst Algerian women in exile, one that recalls the generosity of Lamia's aunt in Algeria.

At this point, however, Lamia was experiencing a situation she had never expected when she left Algeria. Nevertheless, she reminded me that because she held a degree in English literature, she passed her English examination with ease, illustrating once again just how important the fact that she was an educated woman was for her self-esteem. Lamia, throughout the interview, kept referring to the fact that, before moving to the UK, she was as highly qualified as I was – an attitude that made me realise how much she needed to balance the power dynamic between us and maintain a certain equality in the relationship between us as researcher and subject. Also, once in the UK, although she held an English degree, Lamia had to go back to her studies, just as I did, and she appeared to find this rather amusing, although she was satisfied that she accomplished this. She infers here that the need to achieve the British equivalent of her Algerian diploma was one of the main hurdles to her finding a job, rather than the fact that she did not have any immigration status and, legally, was not allowed to work. However, despite passing her Cambridge Proficiency examination, due to her lack of legal status, she was forced to work in a restaurant, but although she found it demeaning, she recognised it was the route everyone in her situation was forced to take; she was not the only one. By 'everyone', Lamia refers to all migrants, but maybe more particularly to all those Algerian women

who came to the UK at around the same time. Lamia proudly points out that she was promoted to the position of chef as a result of her hard work and competence; by contrast, there was never any mention of promotion in Algeria. In fact, Lamia was offered no rewards of any kind; rather, she experienced sexual harassment and dismissal. Although the restaurant business was not her field of interest, the most significant thing here, in terms of an analysis of this research, is the sense of reward the work gave Lamia and its positive impact on her self-esteem. She may, in fact, have started rebuilding her fragile sense of self at precisely this point in her life.

### *Claiming asylum*

Nevertheless, the question remains, given Lamia's experience of persecution and the abuse of women's rights in Algeria in general, why she did not claim asylum as soon as she entered the country. Lamia answered this by saying, after a pause, "*I did in the end. But it's not something I usually talk a lot about. Because, it's a bit ... yeah, yeah ... It was very hard. It was a very hard time for me.*" Lamia seemed uncomfortable talking about her asylum claim, despite the fact that I had introduced myself as a refugee who has possibly been through a similar experience. It is interesting to note that while she related her ordeals in Algeria in great depth, she chose to give very little detail about her experience of the asylum process. It is often the case that Algerians choose not to tell compatriots that they have claimed political asylum at all to avoid being stigmatised or labeled, but it appears from the way she responded to the questions that this was not necessarily the case for Lamia.

There are, of course, other reasons why women migrants choose not to tell their asylum stories: women who have been sexually abused, harassed or raped often have difficulty in addressing their experiences. Added to this is the fact that 'gender-related or gender-based persecution' are terms that have no legal meaning per se (Crawley, 2001). Understanding the ways in which women are violated simply because they are women is critical to recognising this as persecution (Freedman, 2015). Similarly, acknowledging the reasons behind this persecution, and its specificity to women, is crucial to establishing the appropriate grounds for asylum within the meaning of international refugee law (that is, the 1951 Refugee Convention). However, it is often very hard to establish a well-founded

fear of ‘serious harm’ because women need to prove that the governments in their home countries have failed to protect them (Crawley, 2001). The most publicised serious harm perpetrated against women only because they are women are all forms of female genital mutilation; however, sexual violence, marriage-related abuse, violence within the family or community also constitute serious harm meted out to women. In response to the lack of legal recognition of this in asylum law, a group of academics, human rights activists and refugee women in the 1980s set up the International Working Group on Refugee Women (IWGRW) and organised the First International Conference on Refugee Woman (ICRW) (Hajdukowski-Ahmed *et al.*, 2008, p.9). The group expressed the need for receiving states to draw up and implement gender guidelines that would particularly focus on the interpretation of the refugee definition from a gender perspective (*ibid.*). The first state to introduce such guidelines was Canada in 1993, followed by Australia and the US, and they were finally adopted by the UNHCR. Subsequently, in the UK, the Refugee Women’s Legal Group (RWLG) published gender guidelines in July 1998, drawing on those existing in other countries (Crawley, 2001).

In 2000, the UK’s Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) adopted the majority of the RWLG recommendations and issued their own gender guidelines in order to assist asylum adjudicators in their assessment of gender-related claims. However, it was only in 2004, possibly well after Lamia claimed asylum, that the UKBA (the Home Office) released a gender asylum policy instruction. It is clear that Lamia suffered from at least one or two ‘serious harms’, as defined above, and that the Algerian state had no legal provisions in place that would have protected her at the time (Amnesty International, 2014). Despite this, however, her claim was refused. Just as for Lamia, many women in similar situations struggle in the asylum process.

Jane Herlihy and Stuart Turner (2007) has investigated the ways in which refugees in general remember and construct their narratives, and how under the stress of forced migration, they tend to tell stories that are fragmented, leaving parts untold. There are several reasons for this, but one of the main ones for many women is the proven relationship between speaking openly about experiences of sexual harassment, or as in the case of Lamia, of being physically abused by a close family member, and denying or hiding the truth in order to avoid exhibiting difficult emotions and feelings of shame. Thus,



the reasons behind Lamia's reluctance to speak about her experience of seeking asylum are probably related both to the events that humiliated her immediately before her departure and to the humiliations she undoubtedly suffered during the asylum process itself.

Papadopoulos' (2002) classic work on the impact of forced migration on individuals' mental wellbeing alerts us to the fact there are two contrasting reasons why refugees choose to remain silent about their experiences: feelings of resilience or of vulnerability. Papadopoulos explains that a person's exterior life can change very suddenly, but their ability to adjust their inner world to these events requires the sort of acceptance of reality that only flows from feeling emotionally stable and 'present'. This state of mind is out of reach for many refugees, who are often overwhelmed with a sense of loss, particularly loss of a 'sense of home' and locus of identity. When added to the difficulty of managing frequent, unexpected changes to asylum laws and procedures, it may be essential to them to remain silent about the migration process in order for the 'healing process' to begin. Forced migration leaves people temporarily disoriented, as though they were frozen in a type of hypothermia, and they need to defrost in order to proceed again with normal life (Papadopoulos, 2002). Lamia, to a certain extent, confirms Papadopoulos' insight when she says:

*In our community, political asylum is considered taboo, like [it is] something bad ... So 'they' don't speak about it and don't give you information, because they never tell you they have been through this process. Or they don't want to be known only as [someone who has been] persecuted: the identity as a refugee fleeing persecution is not all that we are.*

Many Algerians do not claim asylum at all, arguably due to a sense of pride that stems from the struggle against French colonial repression. According to Lamia, many of her fellow Algerians refuse the label of refugee. In fact, many of the Algerians I have met in London through voluntary work with a North London migrant centre are undocumented and show no intention of claiming asylum, rendering any research into the Algerian refugee experience in the UK difficult.

There is also another possibility, however, behind the fact that many of the other Algerians in this survey were also unwilling to tell me they have claimed asylum: I have always been open about the fact that my husband was granted refugee status within a period of time that appears relatively short compared with how long others are often forced to wait. They may have been particularly reticent as they did not want to admit that they had been refused or their claim had not been believed. As I told Lamia my own story before we began the interview, she may have felt too embarrassed to immediately tell me about her humiliating experiences with the asylum process. This section, and the interpretation of Lamia's remark, is significant because it attempts to give a sense of why the majority of the women who participated in this research, regardless of the country they currently live in, preferred not to say whether they had claimed asylum.

At this point, Lamia appeared as if her mind has wandered from our conversation; she settled into a long silence, which made me think she was about to end the interview. Clearly, she did not want to speak further about her experience of seeking asylum. However, for me, this is one of the most interesting parts of her story, so I asked: "Why was it so hard to claim asylum, do you think? Can you tell me more about it, if it's not too painful? I'll understand if you don't want to." Reluctantly, Lamia decided to answer my question:

*It was much more because I lacked information, and also guidance ... it was all of that. And because I was a woman, I didn't think about claiming political asylum at all when I was looking for a way to get my papers here.*

This remark suggests that Lamia, between the time her visa expired and her asylum claim, may have explored different paths to becoming a legal resident, or at least of extending her right to stay in the UK. During this time, her mental wellbeing certainly suffered as a consequence of the uncertainty and sense of exclusion from society. This also reveals the lack of support and information available for anyone seeking asylum in the UK.

It is common for women, particularly those fleeing war and conflict, to have little or no knowledge of, or access to reliable sources of information about, asylum procedures in the receiving country; they may not even know they have a right to claim asylum simply

because women are rarely perceived as political refugees. Yet, as Susan Forbes-Martin (2003) and Valentina Moghadem (1994) argue, the countries which produce the highest number of refugees generally lie within the aforementioned 'patriarchal belt' (see Chapter Three), which runs from North Africa eastwards to South East Asia – although the majority tend to end up internally displaced within the region and relatively few reach western countries. Furthermore, Moghadem (1994), who has studied the participation of Algerian women in public life after the country's war of independence, points out that despite their full participation in the armed liberation forces, women's social and administrative status was rapidly reshaped by the Family Code, which denies women the ability to exercise citizenship rights. Transgressing both this legislation and traditional customs, as Lamia did, is therefore a de-facto political act of resistance.

The 1951 Refugee Convention remains the key internationally recognised definition of a 'refugee', their rights and the legal obligations of states towards them. The Convention states a refugee to be a person who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable, or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country". Thus, a person is recognised as a refugee only if he or she has a "well-founded fear of persecution" either by the state or by political groups operating outside state control. Persecution suffered in the private sphere of the family, as in Lamia's case, is not considered political but part of a 'private culture', and victims of this sort of persecution are for the most part not considered deserving of international protection. Many women refugees, therefore, do not fulfil the Convention's criteria. Nevertheless, if we look at the gender-specific problems Lamia faced, which included the threat of violence from her father and the general atmosphere of violence against women in Algeria at the time (CEDAW, 2009), she did in fact face persecution; both the male-dominated culture and the presence of conflict contributed to her decision to leave the country.

There is controversy over whether gender-related persecution should be recognised as a basic violation of women's rights by an oppressive culture and/or religion. Crawley (2001) believes that an acceptance of cultural relativism is often used in an attempt to exonerate such oppression. What is crucial in such an argument is the idea that

human rights are not universal; rather, they need to be adapted to the cultural context – for example, the fact that Lamia’s father beat her might be considered a violation of her human rights in a British or European context, but it appears that this does not apply to a woman who bases her asylum claim on this experience (Guemar, 2011). Indeed, Lamia’s remarks suggest that her claim was refused, and that her legal representative was not competent enough to defend a claim based on gender-based violence and discrimination. The main question is how to argue that such violence is persecution and to demonstrate that the state in the claimant’s country of origin is unable or unwilling to protect her. This is extremely difficult, particularly if a lawyer is not already conversant with the specific problems women face. Women claiming asylum based on gender-based violence often find their applications are refused, and in the process they risk being reduced to destitution or subject to deportation or detention. This situation undoubtedly added more stress to Lamia’s life, but it was the ineffectiveness of her immigration solicitor that seems to have been her main concern. In research by Crawley (2010), to which I contributed, into the reasons why asylum seekers decide to come to the UK, it appears that the main attraction still remains the country’s reputation as a defender of human rights. Lamia had certainly put her faith in this reputation, and this gave her the strength to defend her case:

*When I [got all the evidence for] my case and went to my solicitor, he told me: “I have never seen anybody representing themselves like you do.” I was doing it like homework, you see; I was doing my research, all the expert [opinion] on what was going on in Algeria. The solicitor did nothing.*

Luckily, Lamia is a highly educated woman with transferable skills and expertise, and she was already fluent in both written and spoken English. This was of immense help to her when it came to finding evidence to support her asylum claim:

*My case was based on the abuse of women’s human rights and, [because I am] a woman of strong opinions, on not being able to go back [to Algeria]. I got in touch with the organisation SOS Femmes en Détresse [Women in Distress], because here they say: “What will happen to you if you go back?” You know, the stuff about relocation. “[Why*

*can't you move to another town [in Algeria]?" They have no idea that an Algerian woman cannot go to another town. They [will] find you and they [will] kill you because, if you are a father and have a daughter living in another town, that is simply inconceivable, it doesn't make sense. You see, even when you explain, they don't understand.*

Lamia's words illustrate how harsh the UK asylum process is when it comes to women. There are three situations in which it is considered that there has been a failure in state protection of an individual: 'serious harm' has been inflicted by the authorities or associated organisations; has been committed by others but the authorities are unwilling to give effective protection; or has been committed by others and the authorities are unable to give effective protection. In international law, gender-related 'serious harm' against women, simply because they are women, is most commonly related (but not limited) to marriage-related abuse, violence within the family or community, and domestic slavery. "Owing to a well-founded fear of persecution", Lamia was both unable and unwilling to return to Algeria. However, her solicitor had to prove not only that Lamia had suffered 'serious harm' in Algeria, but also that the state had failed to protect her.

This is the first time that Lamia had mentioned a women's rights organisation in Algeria, despite the fact that when she was living there she had need of their services. Lamia only got in touch with SOS Femmes en Détresse, which is based in Algiers, after her British solicitor had failed to argue her case adequately. SOS was formed in the early 1990s to tackle the urgent need of homeless women who had been evicted from their married home following divorce. The organisation then expanded into other areas when it noted that divorced women were not the only victims of the Family Code, and there were many other girls and women suffering from violence and oppression within the family, often forbidden to continue their studies, work or even leave the house – in other words, women who had been reduced to the position of domestic slaves by their male relatives. To defend her asylum claim, Lamia needed to prove that the harm she had experienced was sufficiently serious to be described as 'persecution' and could be measured against the spirit of the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the human rights entitlements recognised by the international community. Despite the difficulties involved in doing so, Lamia – spurred on by her dismay at her immigration solicitor's lack of understanding of

her case – turned into a human rights activist in her bid to challenge UK asylum policy, realising her agency in the process. She was not politicised in Algeria, or at least she does not portray herself as such; she never mentions involvement with any sort of activism in defence of women's rights there. It was only when she was confronted by the threat of deportation from the UK that Lamia became aware of how thin the barrier is between the personal and the political for any woman who dares to become visible.

It seems that Lamia had received the classic refusal letter from the Home Office, advising her to take steps to return to her country of origin where she could be relocated to another city of her choice. When the British government decides to return women who have failed in their asylum claim to countries in which they have experienced violence, and where internal conflict is ongoing, it is obliged to consider the routes and methods of their return, and the potential dangers facing women during this process. However, it is well documented that it is rarely the case that the Home Office investigates these matters and it frequently disregards this obligation, wrongly deporting women or advising on their relocation within the country.

The sort of reception that women seeking asylum face once they arrive in a so-called 'safe' country depends, therefore, on whether it recognises gender-related persecution as a basic violation of women's rights. However, it is well documented that gender guidelines are frequently overlooked, which means that at time when Lamia was defending her case, her solicitor was not even aware of their existence. However, Lamia continued:

*When the barrister came to represent my case, she was a woman, and she was talking about how many restrictions [there are] and how an assertive, educated woman can get into trouble in Algeria ... I agreed with her – if a woman like that leaves [Algeria] and then comes back, she's not going to be trusted. They will say: "She went around with western people, and this and that."*

At this stage, Lamia was disputing her asylum claim at the High Court, and it seems that she was finally satisfied with her legal representation. The barrister was a woman who appeared well able to defend Lamia's case on the basis that she had transgressed Algerian

cultural boundaries. Perhaps Lamia was claiming asylum based on her father's oppression and his physical violence towards her that she mentioned earlier. If women are lucky enough to be given a right of appeal against a negative decision, as was the case for Lamia, the Home Office is required by law to consider the safety of their relocation. Whether it was realistic to expect Lamia to be returned to another, 'safer' part of Algeria was easily disputed at that time, and it seems that the barrister met with success; the rapidity with which she convinced the asylum adjudicator was no doubt due to her competence and her understanding of the Algerian situation.

It is interesting to note how Lamia highlights the issues of mistrust and suspicion harboured towards women who have been living in the west once they return to Algeria. This helps explain why the majority of participants in this research declared their unwillingness to return home. The policy of 'relocation', therefore, must be placed in the context of the politics of gender and the situation of women in the country as a whole. In Lamia's case, given the environment in Algeria at the time, the main problem would have been rejection by her father, which would have led to the whole extended family withholding any form of support, and all the social and cultural issues she would have to face as a consequence of this action. The situation would have been worse because she was single, especially if she was returned to a rural area where women are expected to have male protection – which is in itself a paradox given the prevalence of domestic violence. Lamia would also face discrimination in terms of finding a job to support herself, a difficulty she had already encountered prior to her flight. Relocation was clearly not appropriate in her case, since it would have left her with no alternative but to seek her family's assistance, re-exposing her to a "well-founded fear of persecution" and the risk of 'serious harm' that she had fled from in the first place.

The restriction of women's rights in a post-conflict context is not unusual, and post-1990s Algeria was no exception. For example, Article 7 of the Family Code requiring the presentation of a pre-nuptial medical certificate before registering a marriage was reinforced in 2006 ( JORADP of 14<sup>th</sup> May 2006). The Algerian government argued that this was to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and hidden STDs, as well as to protect women from blame if the marriage does not produce children. However, civil servants, and of course most of Algerian society, interpreted this article as requiring a certificate of

virginity from future brides. Although women's rights associations and feminists have strongly denounced the misinterpretation of this rule, it is still widely implemented in this way. This practice was not new in itself but now it has been made 'official' and compulsory. This explains what Lamia meant when she mentioned the lack of trust towards women who return after living abroad, and it may well have been something she had already experienced when she finished her studies in Algiers and was due to go back to her village – she decided against this, perhaps fearing how she would be regarded by her family and the wider community. As explained in Chapter Four, since the most important aspect of this trust is related to women's sexuality, young women who study far from home and live on a university campus are generally considered 'immoral'. The same would apply to those who return from a western country. Proving their virginity becomes one of the only ways to re-install trust. Against the backdrop of such discriminatory legislation it is not surprising that post-1990s Algeria saw violence against women on the streets increase to such a point that a draft bill outlawing such acts was presented to the senate more than once, although it was rejected each time, most recently in 2015. In addition to this, at the time Lamia was disputing her asylum decision, Algeria was still suffering residual terrorist attacks – these lasted at least until 2005 – despite the implementation of the Amnesty Law.

Lamia's barrister was successful in her representation, and Lamia shows her admiration of her: she appeared to have a good understanding of what a professional woman faces when she dares cross patriarchal boundaries in a country such as Algeria. In truth, after having spent some years in the UK, Lamia may have realised that every society is patriarchal to some extent, and that gender discrimination also occurs in western countries. After her negative experiences with the Home Office and her previous immigration solicitor, Lamia appreciated the barrister's sense of solidarity with and compassion towards her.

### **The emotional impact of migration**

Lamia appears to have found meaning in her plight and to have learnt how to transform negative experiences into positive ones in a way that enables her to deal with her day-to-day difficulties. According to Marrousia Hajdukowski-Ahmed (2008), the adjustment to



a new environment and a new life will differ with each woman. Lamia gives the impression that, despite the difficulties she experienced with a gender-blind asylum process, she has retained her confidence in the UK system and its reputation as upholding human rights (Crawley, 2010), and this stimulates her hope for the future and helps her struggle with present difficulties and cope with past trauma:

*It was very traumatic, but ... I take a lesson from this: life has no meaning without certain struggles. It has no meaning. And in fact when I see our kids, they have it easy. I don't know how they are going to manage if they have to face similar situations.*

By saying this, Lamia intimates that she sees herself as a strong woman who successfully surmounted her own 'Kilimanjaro'. Papadopoulos (2004) explains that the negative meaning given to the word 'trauma' does not adequately cover its unique effect on people who experience oppression, ill-treatment and forced displacement. Lamia's narrative suggests that a person will react differently to the different stages of their migratory journey. This process of positive and negative reactions to trauma is well illustrated in Lamia's remark; in the end, she responded positively, and now even wonders how 'our kids' are going to survive the difficulties of their daily lives without having experienced the same hardship. As she explained in the interview, through experiencing painful events in Algeria, she gradually became aware that she should look at the world in a different way and begin to appreciate life more; such positive reactions to trauma often occur when people have experienced oppression or violence, or have been close to death (Papadopoulos 2006).

At this point, Lamia's face expressed mixed feelings of sadness, happiness and hopefulness. It was as if there were several different Lamias present, but the one that prevailed was 'Lamia the brave'. Incontestably, she has exploited her inner strengths to discover self-reliance and find ways of relieving her trauma and overcoming the difficulties related to the migration process. As a professional woman, her determination to retrieve the kind of social status she had worked for back home seems to have motivated her to gain qualifications in a new field in her host country – one that she apparently enjoys. Lamia eventually found work as a project manager in a well-known organisation,

and although she mentioned at the beginning of the interview that she was about to be made redundant, she informed me a few weeks later that she had been offered a better position in another organisation working in a similar field.

To move on with our conversation, I asked her what it meant for her to win her case at the High Court and to be recognised as a political refugee.

*For me, it was my father who was not for women's rights. For him, a woman is there to have kids and to nurture them, clean the house, and so on. I had no right to have friends, to have relationships, to sleep over, to go visit someone. Going to school was already something big.*

Lamia's rather oblique response raises the whole question of refugee women's reconstruction of identity once they reach a safe place. As mentioned earlier, in Lamia's case, her reason for fleeing was strongly connected with the policing of women's conduct in Algeria and the harsh patriarchal rules she was forced to live under and which she transgressed, incurring her father's anger (Yuval-Davis, 1997). It first forced her into internal displacement, leaving village for the city, and then drove her across Algeria's borders to the UK. Here, Lamia reflects on the ambivalence of women's position within the so-called 'collectivity'. It appears that she has constructed the whole of her narrative of exile around the question of the gender discrimination she has experienced. Thus, in reality, it was not her cousin's assassination that made her leave the country, nor was it the atmosphere of terror; instead, Lamia asserts it was her experience of patriarchal restrictions that finally drove her to leave – she suffered more from her father's punishment than from terrorism and her cousin's assassination. She refused to be reduced to the role of serving her brothers or to forgo her ambitions as a bright, educated woman in order to marry. Lamia, in this sense, agrees with the Home Office that she was not a political refugee as understood by the Geneva Convention. She distinguishes herself instead as a woman who stood up for her rights against her father (a symbol of Algerian patriarchy), rather than as a political activist. As she explained to me during a previous conversation, she disregarded politics: she did not consider her struggle against the social conditions she found herself in as a woman in Algeria as political. She explains that she

struggled against the role attributed to all females in her family, where a woman who works outside the house is seen as morally wrong, or at best, a rebel. It is interesting to see how Lamia portrays herself as non-political, despite having been granted political asylum at the end of a long and complicated struggle.

The above remark confirms the conclusion drawn by some feminist scholars of gender and migration (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Moghadam, 1994; Agger, 1994) that the context in which the majority of women become refugees is often the nature of the relationship between gender, nation and nationalism. The reproductive role of women also implies the role of transmitting the traditional social values to future generations, with the result that in some societies harsh strategies are used to control women, and those who transgress these rules are often forced to flee their community and become refugees (Guemar, 2011). Furthermore, the mental wellbeing of refugee women is “intimately connected with their gendered identities and both are influenced by the historical and the cultural context” of where refugee women come from and the environment in the country of asylum (Hajdukowski-Ahmed *et al.*, 2008, p.211). In fact, Hajdukowski-Ahmed’s (2008) research (see Chapter One) indicates there is a strong relationship between women’s mental wellbeing and how they perceive their identity transformations during their journey into exile. She emphasises that refugee women’s identity and agency can be summarised in three essential points: firstly, the terms ‘refugee’ or ‘asylum seeker’ are simply descriptions of a legal status in which people find themselves due to particular circumstances at a particular time in their lives; secondly, refugees already possess ‘multi-layered’ and ‘multi-faceted’ identities even before they are forced to flee; and finally, while men’s and women’s identities are both impacted by the conflicts and human rights violations that are the initial cause their displacement, women are the more vulnerable to violence.

The question of how such women negotiate new identities under new circumstances has unavoidably become a central issue of my study, and I have dedicated a section of my literature review to it (see Chapter One). Lamia is an excellent example of a migrant woman with a multi-layered identity, revealing her capacity to be equally traumatised, angry, sad and finally resilient enough to even forgive father.

## **Reconciliation and forgiveness**

### *Personal reconciliation*

When Lamia continued her story, she remarked:

*In fact, when I made peace with my father, yes, that is another story. I really had a hard time and [I] clashed with my father, because I am a bit stubborn, and I am not like, “because you are my father, I owe you this”.*

This suggests that although Lamia certainly does not regret having confronted her father, now that her life in the UK is more secure, and in many respects better in term of gender equality, she has retrieved a sense of self which has helped dissipate her resentment towards him. Although speaking from exile, it seems Lamia has never managed to cut all her links with her family, and she continues to feel some measure of guilt for having challenged and confronted her father. Here again, I discovered two different Lamias: the one who is happy and satisfied with her life in the UK, and the other who is still suffering from the trauma she endured before and during her journey. She now expressed sadness when broaching the topic of her relationship with her father.

The process of making peace and seeking forgiveness from others depends on each individual's experiences and circumstances. Studies reveal that forgiveness involves getting beyond rage and restoring emotional cohesiveness (Zachar, 2006 p.68). Lamia suggests that seeking forgiveness from her father has diminished her anger towards him. Aaron Lazare (2005) points out that an apology only works well if it acknowledges the offence, offers an explanation for it, expresses remorse and involves reparation of some kind. Lamia's father may well have suffered from her absence, and her decision to go back and make peace with him may have repaired the relationship to some extent. Lamia believes that the clash with her father was partly due to her stubbornness; however, at the same time, she continues to portray herself as a daughter who stands up for her freedom and rights, even if it means losing her father's support and protection. Forgiveness, as demonstrated in Lamia's case, is grounded in the traditions of Algerian Islamic culture. Being forgiven by a parent before he or she dies is what every Algerian aspires to. Exile reinforces this desire because it will be met with high social approbation, as well as

helping attenuate the guilt that is often associated with being forced to leave your homeland, family and friends.

The following quotation also reveals Lamia's attempts to persuade her mother to her side rather than remain an accomplice of patriarchy within the family: *"I had so many conversations and disputes with my mother because of that. But with my father, it was like you don't really have any words to speak."* As mentioned earlier, Lamia is from a generation of post-colonial Algerian women who, unlike their mothers, entered the public sphere, refusing to live under the dictate of their fathers or male relatives. However, she is not the only Algerian of that generation to accuse her mother of not standing up to her father and defending her – an issue reflected in my own story. Whether her mother was involved or not Lamia leaves unsaid, but the fact that she links her dispute with her mother to the fact that she was amongst the few in her village to go on to further education after her *baccalaureate*, suggests that her mother may have been involved in convincing her father to allow Lamia and her sisters take their education further.

*Because in the village, girls should stop at the baccalaureate. [They don't] even have the right to ask about going to university. So, many of them will be successful in their exams but will never dream [of stepping] into a university ... This was in [the village], but it happened everywhere, you see. So the fact that my father let us to go to university was a big thing.*

This appears to be an important turning point in Lamia's narrative. After having portrayed her father as the main person responsible for her pain, she now gives him credit for letting her go to university and encouraging her to study, particularly as it seems that her educational background helped ease her integration into British society. Lamia told me on several occasions how lucky we were in Algeria to access free higher education; she believes she could not have fought the asylum process if she had been illiterate or less well-educated – and that was partly due to her father's attitude to girls' education. Lamia proved that with education she could work and provide for herself in the UK, proving her father wrong to oppose her plan to leave Algeria. Other girls in her village did not have

the right to even dream of going to university, despite examination successes: *“So I decided to be a bigger person ... I didn’t want him to die without forgiving me.”*

Lamia repeated this statement many times, apparently wanting to take the opportunity of the interview to purge herself of remorse and relieve the pain she feels. Indeed, Agger (1994, p.107) describes how “it [is] sometimes possible for a healing process to develop alongside the actual research process”. Lamia was exteriorising her pain by recounting the same facts again and again, a process which can be therapeutic in itself. In a sense, she passed her pain and sorrow on to me – someone who was occupying a role that was somewhere between a researcher, an activist and a member of the group under investigation. Lamia was aware of this, and was also aware that her story and her pain would (symbolically) be translated and transcribed into a piece of research that would be read by others. However, the fact that she is now content and secure in the UK has enabled her to transcend the pain as well as the anger she felt towards her father, particularly when he beat her. Becoming a mother undoubtedly influenced her feelings of empathy towards him, although Lamia did appear somewhat confused, as her narrative shows – who should forgive whom? However, whatever the outcome, she did not want her father to die before they had the chance to mend their relationship:

*Because anger, it eats away at you, it’s like a cancer. I had it for years [she cries] ... but I let it go. I called a meeting with my father. I had to confront him again, but [ever] since, I swear to you Latefa, it’s like someone took a burden from my shoulders. Anger, it’s not recommended: never, never be angry. You know, in the end, when you forgive someone, you’re not doing it for them, you’re doing it for yourself. Because me, I was holding and holding the anger against my father. Everything that happened in my life, I blamed it on my dad, everything. And one day, I told myself: let’s go for it, because if he dies and I haven’t make peace with him, I will have a bad conscience for the rest of my life. So I decided: I went back home and I had it out ... I had it out and made peace and I asked to turn over a new page and start a new, white one. I let him have his peace, for the sake of reaching peace myself. And when I came back, I [had] never felt as good, so I said to my husband: “Finally, in life, when you seek pardon from someone, you don’t do it for them, you do it for yourself.”*

Lamia repeats herself as though trying to convince me, and perhaps herself, that this was the right thing to do, in order to be one step closer to a clear conscience. Above all, it appears that her visit was mostly an attempt to be relieved of her anger – she may in fact have been aware that high levels of stress and anger over a long period of time can often result in serious physical illness.

Lamia was in full control of the process of reconciliation with her father (who has since passed away), but she was still tearful and emotional when evoking the meeting. It was her decision to bring an end to her resentment towards him after realising she had been blaming him for all the horrors, humiliations, harassment and difficulties she had experienced in Algeria; in a sense, she had placed all the responsibility for the inequalities and oppression she had faced at her father's door. Having lived for some time in a country where respect for women's rights is enshrined in law, Lamia was mentally well-equipped to call for forgiveness. She was not certain of the response she would receive, either from her father or the rest of the family, but that was not the most important point: the motivation behind reaching out to her father was a personal one, her conscience would be clear. Moreover, the lack of any relationship with family members back home can be particularly difficult to bear in the context of exile, because they often represent the only concrete link a migrant has with their 'imagined homeland' (Cohen, 2010).

*And in fact, this [oppression] wasn't personal, in reality, because my brother didn't experience [it]. No ... it's not personal: this is a society in which my father was a victim [too], in which women have a second-class position or third-class, or God knows what, and me, I was fighting against that. So, in a way, it is not that he hated me or I hated him. It's not personal. I had to admit that this was how girls struggle in the majority of Algerian families. I know Algerian fathers who are cooler, fathers who are open-minded about women's rights, but they are a minority. In nine out of ten families, these are the challenges you will meet, unfortunately.*

Lamia knows that her father would not have placed the same restrictions on her brother; he probably would not have opposed him leaving Algeria and may have even have offered

him financial support. Inequality in the treatment of sons and daughters is common in Algerian society and is part of the larger patriarchal machine. Lamia uses the term second or third-class (the literal translation is ‘secondhand’, with the allusion to merchandise) to describe women’s position in this machine – one in which, she realises, her father was also a victim to some extent.

### *Reconciliation in Algeria: politics at home*

But what about the other horrors Lamia experienced? Regardless of her father’s behaviour, there were other situations in which Lamia suffered discrimination, harassment, persecution and, more importantly, witnessed terror attacks, during which she came close to being killed – as did so many others in Algeria at the time. What about reparations in terms of the country as a whole?

During the Black Decade, the Algerian army was accused by international human rights organisations of committing most of the massacres that took place (Chomsky, 1999). Evidence to support these accusations came from victims similar to Lamia, who experienced the terror of those years at first hand. The National Popular Army, inheritors of the mantle of the Army of National Liberation (ALN), which was held in high esteem internationally for liberating the Algerian people from French colonial rule, lost its integrity as a result of such accusations, especially those made against a few of its generals who were believed to have been involved in the assassination of intellectuals and journalists. The army, therefore, had first to end the bloody conflict, and then to face these accusations. As a result, the state considered the idea of a process of national reconciliation modelled on the Argentinean experience (following its military dictatorship in the 1980s) and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In Argentina, a report by a 1983 commission opened the door to the subsequent trial of members of the army who stood accused of the ubiquitous use of torture. These trials were recognised as an important factor in appeasing political and social tensions after the end of the dictatorship; however, they appeared to have had little impact on forgiveness and reconciliation at an individual, grassroots level (Balch, 2006). In the Algerian context, the restoration of security and peace following the horrors of the 1990s required answers to specific questions regarding the motives behind the generalisation of



violence, as well as the specific assassinations of intellectuals during that time. The main question that follows is: “How can such injuries be compensated, and what should happen to those responsible for enacting them?” In 1995, following a series of secret negotiations with leaders of the Islamic Army of Salvation (GIA) (Belhimer, 2014), the Algerian army and the government attempted to respond to these two questions. President Liamine Zeroual, himself a major-general, proposed an amnesty law, which was known at first as the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation (Arnould 2007).

According to Ammar Belhimer (2014), Valerie Arnould (2007) and George Joffé (2008), the design of the charter was grounded in the historical Algerian cultural/religious concept of *rahma*, which can be translated as ‘clemency’. It is also associated with two other religious concepts: *moukafa’a* (reward) – that is, a heavenly reward bestowed by God – and *taouba* (repentance), on condition that guilt is acknowledged and forgiveness sought (Belhimer, 2014). Arguably, however, the charter was also grounded in an aspiration amongst the majority of ordinary Algerians for a peaceful life. This desire for peace has been present throughout Algeria’s post-colonial history and was best demonstrated during the summer of 1962, also known as the Algerian ‘Summer of Discontent’. An internal dispute between the FLN and the ALN (its armed wing) over post-colonial authority could have led to an earlier bloody civil war, but thousands of Algerians, including a large number of women, marched through the capital demanding peace and reconciliation, shouting: “Seven years, it’s enough” – an allusion to the seven years of war against France that had just ended.

Thus, when in July 1999, three months after his election, President Bouteflika passed a law on ‘civil harmony’, it was widely approved in a referendum: 98 percent of Algerian citizens voted ‘yes’ in an 85 percent turnout (Belhimer, 2014). There was, however, little information on the main points of the law, which enacted special measures for the exemption from prosecution for members of terrorist organisations who had not committed assassinations, caused permanent disability, committed rape or used explosives in public places, and who promised to cease all terrorist activities. In September 2005, Algerians were called on to participate in a second referendum to decide on a general amnesty, where they were simply asked to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to peace. Algerians, of course, voted massively in favour: 97 percent, with 79 percent of citizens participating, only

slightly less than the previous referendum (Belhimer, 2014). However, informal reports from journalists who gathered information from outside the polling stations pointed to a much lower participation rate and incidences of fraud. International observers were not allowed to be present (Belhimer, 2014). Furthermore, Moghadem (2010) points out that this amnesty was rejected by all Algerian feminist organisations and many of those women who had been forced into exile, as confirmed by this research. Moghadem (2010, p.180) has further identified a new wave of Algerian feminists, including women psychologists focused on addressing post-conflict trauma, who opposed the amnesty and put forward an urgent demand to first end all violence against women in the country.

Following this glimpse of the use of ‘forgiveness’ in the context of Algeria, it is necessary to look more closely at the concept. As Jacques Derrida (2001, p.27) explains: “There is no limit to forgiveness provided that we agree on some proper meaning of this word.” Derrida distinguishes two categories of forgiveness: ‘*le pur pardon*’, which is unconditional and often irrational, and ‘transactional’ forgiveness. They are undoubtedly interrelated, but this analysis is only concerned with the second, also known as ‘interpersonal forgiveness’ (Gingell, 1974). Evidently, interpersonal forgiveness can only happen between individuals, often requiring a face-to-face confrontation and negotiations in order to achieve a more harmonious and healthier relationship. Thus, interpersonal forgiveness cannot be between a person and an event, such as the Holocaust, because, as John Gingell (1974) says, a person cannot forgive the perpetrators unless he or she was personally involved.

Drawing from this debate, and considering Lamia’s personal experience of terror during the Black Decade, I was very interested to hear her views on the *rahma*/reconciliation or amnesty, and if she associated forgiving her father with the process of forgiving those who plunged Algeria into a climate of terror. My curiosity was particularly aroused by the fact that the violence perpetrated against women during these years has finally been recognised (Lloyd, 2006), resulting in an urgent call on the Algerian authorities to respond with adequate policy measures. I asked Lamia: “Have you heard about the vote on the amnesty in Algeria? What do you think of it, as a woman?”

*Ah yes, the Amnesty Law. Well, when it first came out I thought it was outrageous, I thought it was unfair, because there is a difference: you put someone on trial [first] before you forgive him, and then you decide on an amnesty. For me, personally, the amnesty in Algeria would have been ok if families of the victims had been given the right support, or maybe if they had consulted them. You can't decide on behalf of somebody who was hurt [or who had] a person close to them killed. For example, for my cousin's parents, there is no way they can forgive the killer.*

In response to my question, Lamia quite straightforwardly suggests that she rejects the general amnesty, even finds it 'outrageous' and 'unfair'. She first talks in general about those who committed these crimes, and then moves on to give the example of her cousin's family. Without face-to-face confrontations or the trial of those who committed these acts of terror, Lamia believes there cannot be forgiveness. As for her cousin, she asserts that his parents will never forgive the murderer. Lamia now lives in London, and she witnessed how Algerians with FIS tendencies in exile in the UK condoned the assassinations that took place in Algeria and how, following the legislation of 28 February 2006, these same people were invited by the Algerian embassy to use the *rahma* law to benefit from the amnesty.

In the above quotation, Lamia also addresses the question of healing as an important enabling device for reconciliation. According to David Brendel (2006), there is no miracle recipe for healing the traumas inflicted by war and conflict, and each society should find its own path, corresponding to its specific religious and cultural particularities. Consequently, understanding the pain of a traumatised community calls for attentive consideration of the individuals who have been personally affected. Indeed, collective healing is conditioned by the healing of these individuals; it is crucial that the two processes occur in parallel. Brendel (2006, p.16) extends this argument further by saying that "[t]he two process appear to stand in a dialectical relationship to one another", implying that the healing of both should be considered as equally important, since they interact, constantly informing, shaping and responding to one another in a non-linear way. Due to the complexity of individuals' reactions to trauma, and their specific aptitude for resilience, as well as the historical, political and cultural circumstances of the societies in

which trauma has occurred, healing and reconciliation will not be an easy process, eliciting straightforward responses (Brendel, 2006). This has been shown by the experience of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Committee, which allows individuals to share stories, express their feelings, apologise and achieve some measure of forgiveness. Talking from exile, Lamia seems to be aware that no such process took place in Algeria, despite the high participation in the two referendums on the amnesty. Indeed, even if such a process had been initiated, women would have found it hard to participate due the social barriers they face, particularly in the rural areas, and their difficulties in accessing mental health services.

Seeing Lamia's enthusiasm when talking about this issue, and wanting to know the possible level of her involvement in any human rights projects related to Algeria, I prompted her to continue: "Would you have been happy if you had been invited to the consultations that took place before the law of general amnesty?" Lamia responded promptly:

*Yes, of course, I would have loved having my say, at least as someone who has lost a close member of her family. No one can go and forgive on your behalf. You know, at least it would have been something if we have been consulted ... For God's sake, you see them [those who 'repented'] today, walking on the streets... like nothing happened. Those who killed Maatoub, killed this [person] and killed that [person]. No, it's not right. But it has happened; maybe there is a positive side of this amnesty, I don't know. Is it because of the amnesty that Algeria has now regained its security? I don't know. All that I know is that when you don't give any reason for what has happened – and it was not nothing, it was mass murder [Lamia's voice rises] – it's not right.*

All the participants in this research without exception expressed dissent over the Amnesty Law. As explained in Chapter Two, the women who took part in this research are mainly educated, highly qualified women who regard themselves as secular, although not all identified themselves as 'eradicateurs' (see Chapter Three for an explanation of this term). In the Algerian military's blind battle not just against those who committed terrorist acts but against anyone suspected of falling under the influence of political Islam,

soldiers (encouraged by the ‘*eradicateurs*’) were responsible for many bloody mistakes. Joffé (2008) points out that those ‘*eradicateurs*’ who voted against the amnesty represented a minority in Algeria, and this finding is paralleled by Belhimer’s (2014) figures showing the low number of expatriates who participated in the referendum. Lamia clearly expresses the importance of having her say on the proposal for an amnesty; however, as Joffé (2008, p.8) remarks, “[t]here was not to be any truth and justice commission as part of the process of reconciliation”. Instead, President Bouteflika simply asked Algerians to forgive each other and live with each other peacefully again, sharing public spaces, despite the fact that those spaces had witnessed a decade of assassinations, kidnappings, rapes and more. Lamia’s voice betrayed her anger as she continued:

*You know what Bouteflika said to Maatoub’s mother when she questioned him once about her son? “Where do you want me to bring your son’s assassin from? From my pocket?” Do you think this a way to speak to a mother who has lost her son – assassinated? And that was on TV for everyone to hear. That’s not a way of showing compassion. Yes, you may not know the killer [and] yes, you may not be able to do anything about it, but if you are the president of the country, you should be able to do something. It was not what she wanted to hear.*

Lamia seems to be very concerned with what is happening in Algeria, despite living far from the country. Matoub, whose mother Lamia mentions here, was a famous singer and a symbol of rebellion for Algerian youth, especially in Kabylia, Lamia’s home region (Algeria Watch, 2001). He was killed in June 1998. Lamia shows empathy towards a bereaved mother who was publicly humiliated by the same president who imposed the Amnesty Law on Algerians, a law supposedly grounded in the tenets of reconciliation and forgiveness. It has in fact been argued that one of the main reason for the law’s failure is the overall absence of respect for the rule of law in Algeria (Arnould, 2007). As a result, there is a feeling of distrust, resentment and betrayal amongst the families of the victims of terror and the disappeared. During my observation of online discourse over a period of four years for this research, and on my last trip to Algeria in July 2015, I noticed the sense of betrayal that is felt by the majority of Algerians, particularly women who have

experienced a dramatic increase in levels of domestic violence and sexual assaults on the street since the law's adoption. Although not officially recognised, it has been widely reported that several of those who 'repented' kept their weapons and have used them to commit 'honour killings' against female members of their families.

Enforcing the rule of law is the most important part of a process of reconciliation (Brendel, 2006). Before the cancellation of the election plunged the country into the Black Decade, post-colonial Algeria had been subject to two other military coups: one in 1962 (cited earlier) and a second one in June 1965. It is important to mention that Bouteflika, who recommends that Algerians learn how to disregard past violence and forgive those who committed it, was personally involved in both. The assassination or imprisonment of several political leaders took place in those periods, as well as during the cancellation of the 1992 elections. As explained in Chapter Three, state violence against ordinary Algerians had started some time before January 1992: in April 1980, for example, students in Algiers and Tizi Ouzou, who were calling for official recognition of *Tamazight* (Berber) as a national language, were beaten and imprisoned; and in October 1988 the Algerian army shot and tortured young people who took part in riots over the lack of employment, freedom and justice (Roberts, 2003). Hence, the relationship between Algerian citizens and the authorities was already dysfunctional, and this was simply exacerbated by the Black Decade. To ensure genuine mutual respect and reconciliation between citizens and their government, it is imperative to restore the rule of law (Zachar, 2006, p.96). However, as Lamia's observation shows, this is clearly not the case in today's Algeria:

*So, for me, this amnesty, is it really [one]? I know that [the murder of] someone is hard to take, killing without giving any reason is hard to take, and with no justice, no trial, I'm not sure if I agree [with the amnesty]. Justice needs to be done.*

Lamia, at this point, seems uncertain as to whether or not to agree with the amnesty. Algerians have generally adopted this somewhat confused position. International journalist Robert Fisk (2015) reports how sceptical highly educated Algerians were at the time about the real purpose of the law, which many considered as a way of whitewashing the crimes committed by both the Islamist armed groups and the regime; the Amnesty

Law was quickly renamed the ‘Amnesia Law’. Here, Lamia tries to find a reason why she should empathise with and possibly forgive the killers, some of whom may have been manipulated by the situation, not even knowing why they committed these atrocities. Once again, two sides of Lamia are discernable: the one who agrees with the idea of a general amnesty because it means the ending of conflict and the other who will only forgive if justice is done:

*Just because thousands of people were killed, and it was general, it doesn’t mean that the pain of individuals should be ignored – it’s someone’s son, someone’s daughter, cousin, neighbour, etc. ... It’s like: “Oh, it doesn’t matter, you’re not the only one.” Everybody who was killed deserves justice ... It doesn’t matter if they were journalists, intellectuals or shepherds; status doesn’t come into it. Beyond that, they were someone’s family member, friend or parent.*

It is also important to note that ‘healing’ as a prerequisite for ‘reconciliation’ is a notion policy-makers often use vaguely or ambiguously. They overlook its importance due to three assumptions: first, the end of violence in itself brings individuals a form of healing; secondly, post-traumatic suffering will eventually disappear as time is the most effective healer; and finally, addressing post-traumatic pain is an unnecessary use of public money, particularly as it is more important to finance projects for infrastructure reconstruction after the physical destruction of conflict.

Lamia, however, bears powerful witness to what happened: she saw random terrorist attacks on the street on an everyday basis. Living and working in areas assumed to be the home of potential terrorists, she also saw violent clashes with anti-terrorist units in which children, women, the elderly and other innocent civilians lost their lives, including (as she mentions in Chapter Five) one of her students. Her earlier story of witnessing, on her journey to work, an old man savagely beaten by a soldier at a checkpoint (Chapter Five) gives voice to the collective pain of the whole country. Lamia wants to say that everyone has his or her own story to tell and wounds to heal, so everyone deserves appropriate therapy, and as the families of victims or the disappeared, or other

survivors of the tragedy, they should obtain justice, regardless of their social status. In this, Lamia also intimates that gender should not be an issue either.

However, the Amnesty Law does not mention post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at all. During one of my several conversations with an Algerian legislator who took part in a discussion on the amnesty and who prefers to remain anonymous, I was told that the reasons behind this oversight lay for the most part in Algeria's "lack of psychosocial expertise in post-conflict situations", and even if there had been such expertise to hand, the regime was not ready to bear the expense. However, the fact that there are several female psychotherapists and artists living in Algeria who have been doing very important work with victims of terrorism and/or rape during the Black Decade gives the lie to this statement. Added to which, the post-1990s coincided with a spectacular increase in the international price of oil, which represents 98 percent of Algerian exports and economic wealth – public expenditure rose to \$800 million between 2004 and 2014, and the country was able to repay all its IMF debt.

Arguably, the regime is unwilling to engage in the process of individual healing because it would need to establish some sort of truth commission and provide public spaces in which people would be able to give their testimonies. On the contrary, the presidential decree of 2006 made prosecution for human rights abuses impossible, and even muzzled open debate by criminalising public discussion about the nation's decade-long conflict. The Algerian regime, therefore, is not ready to reveal the realities behind the Black Decade to the international community, particularly as it fears the appearance of evidence corroborating the widespread supposition that many of the atrocities supposedly committed by terrorists were in fact committed by members of the security forces (Arnould, 2007).

The experience of South Africa (Brendel, 2006) shows that there will be no healing for individuals without justice and no justice without knowing the truth. Relying only on time to heal individuals is not realistic, as Lamia explains:

*It doesn't matter how many years, or whether you are here or there, time can be a healer? I'm not even sure about that; thousands of families out there ... to this day don't know why this happened. There was no reason at all, no reason for S to be killed. A journalist?*



*So what? S has never been a communist or anything like that. She was just a journalist.*

In exile, even after two decades, Lamia still suffers from the traumas of terrorism. As she said earlier, the emotional pain inflicted by her father began to heal after she came to understand the reasons behind his behaviour, looking at the wider patriarchal society of which both she and her father were victims. In the case of the Black Decade, however, Lamia has no explanation; she cannot make sense of why the violence in Algeria escalated from a dispute between two parties around an election to become mass killings, assassinations and other horrors, affecting the whole country and forcing thousands to flee, herself included. Lamia links her incomprehension of what happened in general to the specific assassination of her cousin. As explained in different sections of this thesis, anyone who was known to have supported the cancellation of the electoral process, as well anyone known to be a communist, union activist or secularist, regardless of gender, received death threats from members of the Islamist armed forces. Journalists were specifically targeted – unconfirmed sources revealed that up to 150 journalists were reportedly killed between 1993 and 2003.

This takes us to the question of ‘who killed whom and why?’ (see Chapter Three), which continues to remain unanswered today because the regime has “for better or worse, prevented inquiries into such questions through its national reconciliation policies and its restrictions on foreign and domestic research” (Mundy, 2010, p.28). Lamia expresses pain when evoking such killings. According to Agger (1994), when a person suffers serious psychological trauma, as Lamia undoubtedly has, he or she will unconsciously try to develop the most appropriate way of healing. “The healing process can be supported both by the conscious part of the ‘self’ and by the structure of which the self is part or chooses to be a part” (Agger, 1994, p.111). Lamia has placed herself in two different contexts: the personal, private one, in which she has developed a coping mechanism by which she has been able to heal the pain inflicted by her father; and the public one, where she cannot reconcile herself to the memories of the terror she witnessed. Although I had only known Lamia a few months before this interview, I was always aware of a painful nostalgia in her voice when speaking of events related to Algeria, even when these were happy ones.

Lamia would have carried on talking about this issue, but I had to bring my interview to its final points, so I asked: “Are you planning to return to live in Algeria one day?” “No, *I will never go back to Algeria. I will go maybe for a visit, of course. We do have ties over there, but I have never thought to go back. I never imagined living there again after all that.*” This response accords with some interesting data revealed by the survey I conducted for this research: out of 180 women who responded, up to 80 percent said they miss Algeria but only 30 percent had any intention of returning, 39 per cent were not sure about it, while 78 per cent said there were barriers to their return. These barriers, the survey reveals, are mainly social and political. Three out of the 15 women I interviewed, whether face-to-face or via Skype, not only said that they have no intention of going back, but also that they do not miss Algeria at all. These figures show that Lamia is not an exception.

To clarify this point, it is necessary to explore a little more deeply the barriers other participants thought they would face if they decided to return. All those I interviewed mentioned their disagreement with the amnesty, considering it an act of betrayal towards women who stood up to terrorism, suffered harassment and violence, lost family members, and often ended up in exile. However, participants have shown a great deal of resilience in rebuilding their lives in their host societies. To illustrate, 83 percent of respondents are working in highly skilled positions, including academia, and up to 28 percent have now obtained a postgraduate degree in a different area to their former subject expertise (due mainly to the lack of equivalence between their Algerian diplomas and those in their host countries). One participant, who lives in France, summarised the situation by saying: “*I won’t go back, because the main reason why I left Algeria is the lack of women’s rights. A woman’s life over there is daily social suffering.*” Another participant from London gave more personal, tangible reasons:

*Algeria [has become] a country hard to live in. I get frustrated with almost everything when I go on holiday [there]. Horrible staff at every public administrative [office], mountains of stupid paperwork, no facilities for children, no libraries, no parks, no grass, no safety, a poor educational system, no sense of health and safety, not to mention the hospitals. And the Islamisation of the society, with a very poor understanding of religion,*

*focusing only on women's outfits and beards ... lack of readers, lack of cinemas – my list is long, [and] I can top it with the fact that I am now in a mixed marriage. It [would be] impossible for my western husband to live happily in Algeria.*

The agency and resilience of these traumatised women is illustrated by their ability to rebuild their lives, and most importantly, reconstruct their identities as highly skilled women. In fact, all participants revealed symptoms of traumas, alongside their success in fully participating in their host country's life. For these women, adaptation to a new environment was a process requiring coping abilities and emotional resources (Hayward *et al.*, 2008). However, returning to today's Algeria, if only for holidays, involves frustration and stress, and – at least in Lamia's case – fear:

*I've been here [more than] 20 years. I now feel [at] home here. And believe me, every time I leave Heathrow for Algeria, there is a fear that never leaves me. When I go on holiday anywhere else, I'm fine. But [travelling to Algeria] I stress, I can't even drink my coffee before going to the airport, because something comes back [to me] and suddenly I feel vulnerable. Yes, vulnerable, that's the word.*

What makes Lamia's narrative so interesting is her capacity to articulate her traumatic story, and the way she discerns between the private and the public when speaking of her experiences in Algeria and the UK, including her decision not to return to Algeria. Her feeling of vulnerability once in Algeria, however, is no doubt due to her status as a woman. Lamia has described her fear, despair and sadness, together with her hopes and her exceptional courage in surviving the horrors of that time and surmounting so many obstacles during her journey to safety. It took her 20 years to feel at home in the UK, but she has now re-created another Lamia. This Lamia has full rights to the city and enjoys gender equality, she holds a British passport and can travel freely on holiday anywhere, yet going back to Algeria still provokes stress and fear. Another Lamia may have been born, but because she has never received counselling, as she revealed earlier, feelings of fear and vulnerability recur when she revisits the place where she lived through terror and violence. It is important to note that it was only following 9/11 that the idea of post-

terrorism mental health care was raised, and the complex relationship between individuals, psychotherapists and the state recognised. After this event, PTSD has even been redefined as a “post-disaster mental health problem” (Yuval Neria *and al.*, 2006, p.239), and it has been agreed that those who witness such an event can never fully recover.

At this point, I had to honestly reflect on my own experience, especially as I have exactly the same feeling every time I go to Algeria: I feel vulnerable because I am a woman. My fear is even greater since I am always worried that the authorities may misconstrue my research, as researching or writing about the Black Decade, particularly from outside Algeria, is regarded as an attempt to tarnish the country’s international image, and anyone who is deemed to have done so faces three to five years in prison or a fine of around £2,500 (Arnould, 2007).

### **Resilience: negotiating a new identity**

However, at this point in the interview, Lamia moved on to speak about her new life in the UK:

*You know, I love the UK. I should have come here much earlier, and I am certain that the best thing I have ever done in my life was to come to London. You know, here, I feel I fit in, like it was meant for me to live here. Yes, there are some problems, but very minor compared to what I have experienced in my life – and there is no fear.*

Lamia wants to express the fact that she is happy with the woman she has now become. She has re-invented her identity, successfully completed the process of ‘re-selving’, and has re-connected with her inner self, the one that fought her father’s repression from the time she was a very young girl (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008, p.41). Here again, Lamia repeats herself to say that she has retrieved the woman she always wanted to be, the one who has now freed herself from the patriarchal restrictions in Algeria, and who is very aware of the socially constructed values of her new society where, she believes, ideas of gender equality and women’s freedom are taken for granted (Forbes-Martin, 2003). She is finally a woman who works and participates freely in the day-to-day life of the city, with no need to seek the permission of a male relation. Although she recognises that

problems and issues do occur, they cannot be compared to the horror and fear she previously experienced:

*In Algeria, I used to fear everything. Here, when I see a policeman, I feel protected. In Algeria, when you see a policeman, you start worrying, especially if you are a woman: 'haggarin', you know. When I go back, as soon as I see a policeman talking into his walkie-talkie, I start shaking. There's something about it I can't figure out. But I do go [back] at least every two years. I'm actually going soon [as] my niece is getting married. I haven't been to a wedding in Algeria for 25 years. I'm looking forward to it [smiles].*

Lamia speaks about fearing everything in Algeria, recalling her fear of terrorism, her father, her boss, physical assaults on the streets and the police, whom she describes as 'haggarin'. This insult derives from the Algerian word 'hogra'; according to Algerian sociologist Abdelmajid Merdaci (2004), the term holds a very specific political meaning, which includes the idea of oppression, bullying and contempt. It is also interesting to note how Lamia changes from using the past tense when she describes how she used to fear everything in Algeria to using the present when describing the feeling of fear evoked in her each time she goes back. Her comment about the difference between the Algerian and British police reveals her very different relationship with the authorities in both contexts, Algeria and UK.

It is very common for migrants to have difficulties re-adapting to the societies they have left when they return, even if only for a short time or on vacation. This can be even more difficult for female migrants if the countries they have migrated to and settled in have facilities and services for women, the disabled and minority groups, in contrast to the societies they have left. In this respect, the contrast is particularly large between the UK and Algeria, where almost none of these facilities exist. However, the most salient difficulty, as this narrative illustrates, is the common reaction of fear amongst those who experienced the terror of the Black Decade. Lamia here talks about this specific sequel to her trauma: her continuing feeling of fear related to her physical presence in Algeria.

An example that vindicates Lamia's attitude is the fact that several incidents of arrests on the streets of unmarried couples have been reported on social media, particularly

on Facebook.<sup>11</sup> In such cases, the woman will invariably be subject to intrusive questioning and humiliation if they cannot prove that the man they are with is a legitimate chaperone, as prescribed by the Family Code; that is, a male relative. There is no law preventing a woman from walking on the street with a man she is not married to, but as Lamia has shown, the implementation of the amnesty legislation in a highly corrupt society, in which judicial power is not separated from legislative power and is influenced by patriarchal attitudes, has given the state the right to randomly control women's 'conduct'. The police, as the frontline representatives of the regime, frequently abuse their power and humiliate women. Added to this, a picture of police beating a woman activist during a demonstration denouncing Bouteflika's fourth term in office went viral in February 2014, and was picked up by the international press. The picture provoked an ongoing online conversation on Facebook and in blogs, in which Algerian women living abroad demonstrated their solidarity with their compatriots in Algeria. This solidarity is inevitably accompanied by a feeling of guilt at having left behind relatives, friends and colleagues who are still suffering from this kind of archaic behaviour.

Despite this, Lamia still continues to visit Algeria. In fact, "transnational ties to the homeland are long-lasting and become important both in reality and in the imagination of many exiles" (Abdelhady, 2006, pp 427-53). Lamia mentions she is returning to attend a wedding in her home village soon, and this seems to make her happy, calling to mind the work of Papadopoulos (2004, 2010) which points out that the loss of 'home' remains the main trauma for people who have been forced into exile. Papadopoulos explains that 'home' is the metaphor used by refugees in general to describe loss of three important things: the geographical space, including its culture, history language and religion; the emotions related to that geographical space, including family experiences and memories; and the locus of identity it provides – that is, the positive validation of an individual's sense of identity by others who know and value them for what they are. Lamia is looking forward to attending the wedding in her village, which she explains has kept its traditional way of celebrating cultural events in defiance of the introduction new practices conforming to radical Islam or new behaviours imposed by the market and globalisation.

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<sup>11</sup> Accessed on 10 March 2013.

The following remark illustrates how Lamia, from outside Algeria, has constructed a somewhat idealised vision of the way things are in her village (Cohen's 'imaginary homeland'), which is immediately contradicted by the recurrence of the fearful memories that plague her each time she does return:

*Over there now, everyone is getting on with their lives, all is normal like before the terrorism ... [pause] But for me, nooo, it's still there, somewhere in my mind: who is going to be killed today? This question, oh my God, can't leave my mind every time I think about Algeria. You'll be amazed to hear that when I go to Algeria, I always expect the worst.*

### **An Algerian women's diaspora**

To close my interview, I asked Lamia the basic question I asked all my participants: "Do you think an Algerian women's diaspora exists? What is your relationship with other Algerian women here in London?" Lamia replied:

*You'll be amazed how many [Algerian women] there are [here], but they're not connected, don't get together, there is no solidarity at all. I know [of] so many Algerian women here. I have friends who I know from university in Algiers. I also worked as a translator, so I know many of the women who claimed asylum here, but they are mainly here with their husbands. It's true that I struggled [on my own] and was isolated at the beginning [with few friends]. It's only recently [that] I met you, and another woman, you see.*

Lamia arrived alone in the UK. This may not have fitted with the cultural norms of the Algerian community in London, which tend towards conservatism, and although she has since moved to an area in London where there is a growing Algerian community and is now married herself, Lamia still feels isolated from her community.

The Algerian women who came to the UK mainly arrived as spouses and did not claim asylum based on gender violence. Lamia mentions 'husbands' here, maybe suggesting that as a single woman she was excluded from Algerian family events, possibly because she was seen as a potential danger, particularly by the wives. As mentioned

earlier, female solidarity in some conservative Algerian milieus is hindered by patriarchy, which often forces women to deploy vigilance if they are to keep the social status and protection provided by their husband, who is allowed by culture and religion to take a second wife. However, Lamia is now married and a mother, so it should be easier for her to integrate into the community, so there must be other reasons behind her continuing sense of isolation from other Algerian women. Reflecting on my own experience as a feminist activist, and on my ethnographic observations of and conversations with other women during my research, a woman who introduces herself as political, an activist, a feminist is often greeted with suspicion by other Algerians, including women. They appear to view someone who openly avows such an identity as a potential threat to the community and its social cohesion. In her last sentence, when she says, “it is only when I met you, and another woman, you see”, Lamia brings me, the feminist activist and not the researcher, into her story. I find this interesting and conclude that she may have decided to trust me with her story only because I had introduced myself as such.



## **Chapter Six: Identity, Transnational Space and Belonging: The Case of Algerian Women**

### **Introduction**

As mentioned earlier, Lamia's narrative appears to encapsulate the experience of many educated and highly skilled women who lived through the horror of Algeria's Black Decade and who consequently decided to flee. Her case study clearly reflects the complex, often interrelated reasons behind such decisions, as well as their gendered basis: it shows that she was driven to seek asylum in another country as much by the harsh patriarchal restrictions, and the discrimination and harassment she experienced, as by the indiscriminate terror, which nevertheless left her with traumatic memories of violence. This chapter, therefore, enlarges on the subjects raised in Lamia's case study, confirming the insights that her interview reveals so cogently, through an analysis of the survey data and supported by quotations from the interviews.

The analysis is broken down into the following sections. The first explores the key issues regarding the (often brutal) circumstances under which the participants were forced to leave Algeria, and reveals the international community's reaction to the situation there in the 1990s, particularly as regards the persecution and assassination of intellectuals and members of the professional class. The second section, meanwhile, investigates the participants' life experience(s) outside Algeria and raises key issues relating to the way they attempted to negotiate new identities in the countries to which they fled. The third section looks at the barriers participants believe they would face if they were to return to live in Algeria. The final section investigates the professional and cultural networks these women belong to; it explores their use of online resources and the role these play in enabling them to maintain their relationship with Algeria and engage in political discussions over the position of women's rights in the country, as well as their perceptions of belonging to a female Algerian diaspora.

### **Persecution and the decision to leave: further narratives**

These women took the decision to migrate during the Black Decade and its aftermath due to a variety of circumstances, and this meant that not all of them could be considered ‘refugees’ as understood by the 1951 Refugee Convention and its protocols. Here, I would like to point out that the majority of participants left Algeria by air, even those who fled under coercion. In relating their pre-departure conditions, participants spoke of a variety of reasons that led them to leave Algeria, from terrorism and political persecution due to their engagement in the public sphere to social discrimination and gender-related persecution based solely on the fact that they were women. Evidently, as in Lamia’s case, these different factors often overlapped, as the following quotation illustrates:

*Let me make it clear to you. When I left Algeria in June 1994, I was in a bad relationship with [my husband]. At a party attended by family and friends a few months earlier, he announced that he wanted to repudiate [divorce] me; it was such a humiliation. I went to seek help everywhere, visited all our friends and his family, but they all took his side. We [then] received a death threat in a letter from the GIA, and because I am half-Algerian, half-French, I went to the French consulate to organise our departure. He refused to leave with us. I took my children [to France] and left him in Algiers; he was assassinated five months later.*

‘Maya’, who is quoted above, had worked as a sub-editor for the same newspaper as her murdered husband. She explicitly stated that her decision to leave was based primarily on the shock and humiliation she had felt when her husband declared publicly that he wanted to divorce her without even speaking to her about it her first. Under Algeria’s Family Code, Maya would have had to stay in the family home until the divorce process had ended, anywhere between three months and two years (Ait Zai, 2011), but in any case, as for many Algerian women in her situation, Maya had nowhere else to go. In Algerian culture, it is very common for the family house to be registered in the name of the husband, even if both husband and wife have contributed towards buying it. Maya explained in the interview that when she went to SOS Femmes en Détresse (Women in Distress) to seek help, she was told that as she was half-French, it would be better for her

if she left the country, especially as terrorism was reaching its peak at the time. At this point, Maya was seeking some form of solidarity as a woman suffering discrimination as a result of the Family Code (a piece of legislation that both SOS and the left-wing milieu she and her husband frequented strongly condemned). Judging from her quotation, however, she was disappointed by the response, believing that the apparent lack of support was due to the fact that she was seen as a ‘foreigner’ rather than a woman – someone who could take advantage of her French passport to leave the country. Yet, despite all that had occurred, when the GIA sent its death threat, Maya expressed her solidarity with her husband and offered him the chance to leave the country with her. During the interview, she expressed sadness that her husband had considered her act of solidarity an offence to his male pride. After repudiating their marriage, it appears he was too proud to accept her offer; he was assassinated six months after she and the children had left Algeria. In tears, she explained: “*We never got divorced, but he is not here anymore*”. Maya’s story reveals the extent to which her decision to leave the country in a time of war and conflict was a gendered one.

The following quotation, taken from an interview conducted with ‘Louisa’, who now lives in the US, further highlights the links between discrimination and violence towards women and the climate of terror at the time:

*For us, it was going or dying. You go, you don’t know where. You meet other people, different people, and at some point, you lose yourself, you don’t know where you are anymore. It is a symbolic death, because you are out of your realm. Call it heaven or hell, but for me, it was an after-death.*

‘Louisa’ and her husband were both journalists in Algeria. She explained how difficult it was to obtain a visa from a western country; Algeria appeared isolated in its war against terrorism. However, when an opportunity to leave the country in the form of a job offer for her husband in the UAE arrived, they discovered that not even their combined salary was enough to pay for the flights. Louisa, therefore, sold all her jewelry to buy her husband a ticket and enable him “*to find a decent place to stay there*”, while she remained in Algeria with her baby for a further few months. In the meantime, she continued to work

and provide for herself and her child, despite the persecution she was forced to endure as a female journalist.

As Lamia commented (see Chapter Five), terrorism in Algeria appeared to provide a further opportunity for certain elements of the male population to violently express hatred towards, and exert more control over, women. This is corroborated by the testimony of another participant:

*I left in September 1994. I would have been killed, so I had to leave Algeria within 24 hours. The reason being I had appeared on French TV strongly criticising the GIA. Well, I must say that as the director of an institute of higher education I had already been threatened by the GIA, which was also threatening to destroy all Algerian universities. They knew that the director was a woman. They came during the night [as] they assumed that I was living in the institute's accommodation, [and] set [it on] fire. The whole institute was completely destroyed.*

‘Nadia’, a left-wing political activist, faced persecution due to her academic position. She was the first woman to be appointed as the head of a high school specialising in medical sciences in Algeria. She held a PhD in chemistry from France, and on completing her doctoral research had been offered a job at the CNRS-Paris (the French National Centre for Scientific Research), an offer she declined in order to return to Algeria. Her subsequent nomination as the head of a medical school occurred at a time when the Algerian government was engaged in a programme of political and economic reform. Nadia went on to recount that on two occasions she had to exclude students, one male and one female, from entering the school because they were wearing what she termed ‘inappropriate clothes’: the young woman was wearing *niqab* (covering her entire body) and the young man, an “Afghani kind of nisf-sake [Islamic clothing]”. The incident became a hot topic of discussion amongst the students and staff, and one day a student came to her office and warned her that it was about time she observed ‘Islamic rules’. Nadia explained that after this incident it was natural for her to consider fleeing – to France in particular, as she had studied there and even previously been offered a research position in a prestigious institute. Despite this, it was not easy for her to obtain a visa:

*So, I applied for a French visa. They told me that I could leave but without my children, who were three and six at the time. I asked if there was a law that says a mother can leave her kids in such a situation, and if yes, I reject this law and say 'no' to it. Especially [given] that my husband was already in France for a conference ... A few days later, a high-ranking military officer (I cannot tell you his name) contacted my family to say: "Ok, she can leave with the children now; we have enough deaths on our [hands]." They contacted Alain Juppé [then-minister at the French Foreign Office] who sent a fax to Algiers advising the consulate to give me permission to leave with my children. I don't know what had really been discussed, I just went to pick up our visas, took my children and left the country the following day. I cried so much on the plane that the passengers thought I had lost someone very close.*

This quotation illustrates the contradiction between Nadia's private and public life, as a mother and as a professional. She explained that the immigration officer at the French consulate considered the persecution against her as political and serious enough to grant her permission to leave Algeria for France. However, her position as the mother of two young children had not been taken into account. This decision was an example of the general lack of gender sensitivity and understanding of the specific needs of women who seek international protection as detailed by Crawley (2001). Added to which, according to Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Leca (1995, 2002), there had been a sharp drop in the number of Algerian citizens granted French visas: while 800,000 visas of various kinds were granted in 1989, by 1994, when Nadia applied and terrorism was at its height, this number had fallen to 100,000. This fall was undoubtedly linked to the fact that the right to asylum was increasingly "less respected in France and in Europe in general", and French politicians on both left and right had begun to vie with each other as to who could appear the most hardline on immigration (Derrida, 2001, p.9).

Nadia's experience of leaving the country was rare; it had certainly been facilitated by her family's privileged connections with high-ranking military officers, as well as her position within the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education. Having said that, the threat to her life was real: between 1992 and 1994, when Nadia's institution was attacked and she

was personally threatened, several Algerian professionals and intellectuals were assassinated, kidnapped or disappeared in sinister circumstances (Bedjaoui *et al.*, 1999). From the cancellation of the electoral process onwards, the regime was subject to severe criticism by international NGOs and human rights groups, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Reporters Without Borders (Bedjaoui *et al.*, 1999), whose members were denied entry to the country. During that time, a group of internationally renowned academics and scholars, including Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Derrida, founded the *Comité International de Soutien aux Intellectuels Algériens* (International Committee for the Support of Persecuted Algerian Intellectuals) (CISIA).<sup>12</sup> The CISIA, as part of the International Parliament of Writers, called on the international community to open its borders to persecuted intellectuals and form a network of 'city refuges'. These cities would be ruled by the 'law of hospitality', giving an unconditional right of asylum to any intellectual or writer fleeing Algeria (Derrida, 2001). Although the CISIA initiative was commendable, it has been accused of being selective, only condemning the persecution of those intellectuals who had supported the cancellation of the democratic process in a bid to prevent the FIS from gaining power (Sidhoum, 2003). It is interesting to note that none of the participants of this study mentioned the existence of CISIA, and neither Maya nor Nadia appeared to have benefited from its support. In fact, it appears they only heard about the organisation a few years after they had arrived in France. Moreover, Nadia's story of her departure was mainly shaped by her feelings of sadness and insecurity, and her anger at the attitude of the French consulate.

By contrast, 'Ferroudja' stressed the oppressive social norms, encapsulated in the Family Law, and the harassment of and discrimination against women as the main reasons behind her decision to leave her country:

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<sup>12</sup> The CISA is a solidarity network of intellectuals, academics and writers that was established in Paris in June 1993 following the assassination of several, mainly French-speaking, secular Algerian intellectuals. Pierre Bourdieu was elected as its president.

*I left at the end of the Black Decade, in early 2000, just after I became a widow. I could not live in peace from the time I was widowed. A single woman cannot live in peace in Algeria, especially if she has already been married, divorced or widowed. You always need to have your husband, your father, your brother or your son with you in order to be [left] in peace. I rejected that life. So it's the laws and [the] harassment of women in my country that scares me, rather than the terrorism.*

A former university lecturer, Feroudja lived and worked in one of those Kabylia cities that were little affected by terrorism, at least until 2000. She was an active member of the Berber Cultural Movement (MCB), which she subsequently left, citing its separatist ideology which she blamed on “foreign and imperialist influence” as the reason. Feroudja also described her involvement with the RCD, known for its secular ideology, but she also left this political group, this time because of the gender discrimination exhibited by its male members: “They pretend to be democrats, but when it comes to women, they (men) are all the same.” She explained that when her husband was alive she was respected by everyone in her area and in her workplace, but his death changed this irrevocably:

*I used to drive and go to meetings late in the evening without any harassment on the streets, but after I lost my husband, even though they knew who I was, merely because I had become single, I lost my rights. I wasn't even supposed to be out after certain hours.*

This statement shows the cultural, psychological and social barriers Feroudja suddenly faced after her husband's death. These barriers are mainly due to the generally accepted stereotype, particularly prevalent in rural Algeria, of divorced or widowed women as intrinsically promiscuous and thus a threat to social stability. Moreover, it is entrenched in the Algerian mentality and the dominant social discourse that if a woman wishes to exert her full citizenship rights beyond the private sphere she needs to be accompanied by a male guardian. In this case, exile is seen as an existential condition for those women who decide to leave the “silent and invisible lives” imposed on them by patriarchal norms (Agger, 1994). Added to her grief over the loss of her husband, Feroudja explained that becoming a widow reduced her status from that of a political activist to that of a silenced

mother who is only allowed to leave the house to work and provide for her children. She felt that she was reduced to invisibility and this, to her, was much more violent and distressing than radical Islam, terrorism and the upsurge of violence.

Feroudja's account contrasts in some ways with that of 'Sonia', who, following her graduation in the late 1980s from a regional university in Algeria, moved to Algiers to work for an international NGO:

*In Algiers, life was much better for me as a single woman. [This was] before the rise of Islamism; it wasn't a place of blind terrorist attacks everywhere. I had rented a small flat on my own and never had any problems. My neighbours used to respect me, including the young men in the area. When I was offered a position in West Africa I took the opportunity and left; it was here that I met my husband. In the meantime, back home, things were getting worse. When our child was born, it was not possible to stay in West Africa so we started to think of moving to a place where we could live in peace, where schools and other services are of a good standard; we ended up in Canada.*

In understanding the circumstances in which the decision to migrate is made, it is often crucial to mention the role of the neighbourhood in which women live. In contrast with the city Sonia came from and in which she graduated, her new surroundings in Algiers seemed more tolerant towards single women. The quotation above suggests that one of the key factors behind her departure was her ambition to widen her experience in her chosen field of international human rights law. However, once she became a mother, other factors influenced her decision not to return to Algeria; she was determined to find a place to live where she and her family could find peace. 'Peace', in contrast to war, terrorism and the harassment of women, is a theme mentioned in several participants' narratives.

Women's decision to leave their homeland in times of conflict can take years to implement as a result of factors which are mainly determined by the fact that men and women experience conflict differently: women often lack the resources and have little control over their movement, particularly in the Algerian case, where they must always be accompanied by a male guardian, regardless of their age or maturity. For example, when



‘Khadija’ explained why she delayed making the decision to flee, she cited her fear of losing her career, but it could also have been because her male guardian (her father or brother) disagreed. As soon as she married, however, the couple decided to leave:

*My idea to leave Algeria arose years before I left, when the violence was at its peak between 1994 and 1999, after completing my studies. The living conditions were bad, but I decided to carry on with my career. I mainly worked as a journalist and was happy with that, but everything else was going wrong. I got married in 2003 [and] my husband and I agreed on the gravity of the situation and decided to leave the country as soon as an opportunity came [up]. He went to the Canary Islands on a business trip [and] I joined him two months later. A few months [after that], we left for mainland Spain.*

The fact remains, however, that the increase in the feminisation of Algerian migration only began in 2000. Although the Algerian army declared a final victory against the Islamist armed forces in that year, random terrorist acts, assassinations of journalists and kidnappings continued (UNHCR, 2014). At a press conference broadcast on Algerian TV in July 2002, the Algerian military’s chief of staff declared an end to the war against terrorism, but insisted that fundamentalism and radical ideology remained an issue against which the civilian government would continue to struggle. To quote his words: “Terrorism is over, but watch TV programmes, listen to sermons in mosques, and look at what is taught in schools today; you will see that radical Islam is still there, blooming” (Algeria Watch, 2002). However, although it was incontestably true that the decade of terror was over, it was arguably the case that Algerians had also witnessed the premature death of their dream of democracy at the hands of the army.

When Abdelaziz Bouteflika came to power in 1999, he promised a return to peace and security. Knowing Algerians’ deep attachment to Islamic values, the statement made by the chief of staff did not pass him by unnoticed. What followed was the implementation of an extensive government agenda aimed at curbing the rebellious characteristics that Algerians are known for – a kind of ‘psychological disciplining’ of the population, mainly by means of the school curricula and the mainstream media, and also, surprisingly, through

the influence of the *zawiya* (Islamic Sufi sanctuary) (Roberts, 2003). Bouteflika and his government were aided in their programme by the substantial increase in the price of oil between 1999 and 2008, which helped them purchase social peace.

What follows is my own interpretation of the situation. Bouteflika manipulated the credulity of the mass of the people, which had manifest itself previously in support for religious extremism. He presented radical political Islam as a disguised heresy and disseminated the message through every media outlet that ‘true Islam’ demands adherence to your ruling class and submission rather than revolution and resistance. This is one explanation as to why he was able to alter the Algerian Constitution to allow him to remain in power for a fourth term with no apparent popular opposition. Furthermore, the fatigue of the general population and their desperate desire for peace after the long conflict of the Black Decade meant that the regime was able to undermine their naturally rebellious nature. The few activists who did oppose the fourth term were met with criticism. Bouteflika, despite the fact that he was by then suffering from very poor health, was elected by a large majority. Although opposed to radical Islam, the Algerian ruling class successfully turned the majority of citizens into fatalistic Muslims, at least for the time being to suit their purposes.

An interesting and important point to draw attention to here is the appointment of female imams known as *mourshidates* (‘Islamic guides’) by the Algerian Minister of Religious Affairs, in order to combat Islamic radicalisation (Belalloufi, 2015). Amal Belalloufi (2015) reports that *mourshidates* are required to hold a degree in Islamic studies, which includes a certain level of psychosocial knowledge. These imams work with the women and girls in the mosques, and visit prisons, hospitals and schools. Their role is to spread a tolerant form of Islam and prevent the radicalisation of young girls by steering them away from radical preachers. At least 300 *mourshidates* have been appointed in the country during the last decade (Belalloufi, 2015). However, unlike their male counterparts, they are not allowed to preach or lead the prayers in mosques.

Despite this, one of the consequences of the authority’s use of Islam process was the reinforcement of a patriarchal ideology, provoking a rise in violence against women, which was often tacitly supported by the media and police, as Khadija’s narrative shows:

*I was feeling threatened, first as a woman and second as a journalist. At that time, my work and my political affiliations were clearly both anti-system and against terrorism. So, I was fighting both sides, which was very hard. It was a fascinating job; however, it was difficult to achieve anything in the security and socio-political situation Algeria was plunged into during those years. There was an opportunity for us to leave, so we did.*

For Khadija, working as a journalist was challenging but enjoyable – up until 2003. That was the year when she and her husband decided to leave the country. I recall here one of the first conferences called by President Bouteflika following his election, when, in a threatening manner, he compared journalists to ‘*tayebat al hammam*’ (a pejorative term meaning ‘women gossip mongers’); the underlying message was, “you will get what is coming to you”. After that public statement, the repression of and violence against journalists began to rise once again. During the summer of 2002, at least four journalists were killed, adding to the huge losses suffered by the media during the Black Decade (IREX, 2005). One of them, Abdelhak Belriadouh, a regional correspondent of *El Watan*, committed suicide in the most appalling circumstances: after being kept in isolation and tortured for three days he was dragged into the streets of the city where he worked and left there. Shortly afterwards, he took his own life (IREX, 2005). Following this incident, Transparency International (TI) published a press release on 16 September 2003 calling on the Algerian government to provide journalists, particularly those working in small cities, with more protection, so they could continue their investigations into the rampant corruption in the country (TI, 2003). However, the noose tightened, particularly around those journalists (and others) who dared to denounce this rising tide of corruption, and many were forced into silence or exile, while others sank into depression or committed suicide.

Khadija and her husband were working in a small city in western Algeria where there was little available protection, so once an opportunity to leave the country came up, they took it. She explained how she found herself on the Canary Islands – by chance rather than by choice. She did not give me any details about this particular part of her journey but told me that she could only join her husband a few months after he had left. They spent

two years there before they could leave for mainland Spain. During this time, the Canary Islands was one of the routes taken by many undocumented migrants from the African continent in their bid to reach Europe; very few were deported; instead, they were usually held in detention centres before being sent to Spain and released. Once in Spain, however, many ended up in limbo, unable to obtain a work permit – until 2005, when the Spanish government granted an amnesty to 700,000 irregular migrants (Tremlett, 2005). Khadija briefly mentioned the amnesty, so I assumed that she and her family may have benefited from it to regularise their administrative status.

On a different note, it is important to mention that a considerable number of participants who left between 2000 and 2010 received scholarships from the Ministry of Higher Education to study abroad, or self-funded a postgraduate degree study in their new societies. Those who succeeded in their studies, perhaps the majority, prolonged their stay and then exchanged their student visa for work visas. As ‘Wahiba’, who holds masters degree in science from a UK university and who now works in banking, explained: *“I wanted to go back, but the situation over there discouraged me. I applied for a job and was hired immediately, so I stayed.”*

Some participants, however, did not say what their immigration status was. This was mainly the case with those who left in the post-Black Decade period, which coincided with the imposition of harsher restrictions on migration to ‘Fortress Europe’. Here again, it is likely that the “most immediate cause of this new displacement is the devastation wrought by more than 30 years of neoliberal policies in the whole region” (Cetti, 2015, p.53), the dismantling of public services and the aggravating factor of gender discrimination in the workplace in Algeria, rather than fear of terrorism. The narratives of the majority of participants also makes clear the role of professional positions, level of educational attainment and various kinds of financial and social support, such as scholarships or professional transnational networks, in shaping the decision to leave.

Deriving from in-depth-interviews, this study has also revealed a certain degree of post-traumatic stress amongst some participants due to the context in which their departure occurred, and which first and foremost involved the loss of a sense of ‘home’. Here, as suggested by Papadopoulos (2002), the loss of ‘home’ is a metaphor that not only

refers to the loss of a physical space but also to the loss of continuity in the respondents' relationship with the external world. "*My journey to my actual host country (Spain) was a mixture of feelings,*" explained Khadija. "*It was a kind of relief, yet it was also painful. Leaving behind my whole life, my job, my family and friends was hard.*" As outlined in the literature review (Chapter One), loss of home also involves the loss of an external locus of identity that could enable the individual to value herself in exile.

This section has shown that it is difficult to discern voluntary migration from forced migration in times of war and armed conflict, especially in the case of women, whose experience(s) of departure are unique in content but similar in context: their struggles in both the private and the public sphere in 1990s Algeria. The following sections illustrate how the process of regaining a sense of 'home' through a process of reconstructing new identities is also gendered, and how the recovery of a complex sense of self "open[s] up a space for developing agency" from which "transforming opportunities [can] emerge" (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008, p.41). They also show how concretely the resources, level of education and circumstances under which participants arrived in their host countries shaped their desire to either join or ignore existing Algerian networks, including professional ones, or to create new meanings of solidarity on arrival in the receiving country and during the adjustment process.

### **Rebuilding lives and a sense of self**

This section explores different phases of the participants' experience of exile – from arrival to adjustment in the host society. Many faced difficulties in re-building their lives and professional careers, although more than two-thirds of the participants (78.5 percent) said they had now entered the labour market. In many countries, however, participants' lack of administrative status delayed their access to higher education and the labour market. The women I interviewed and met during the course of this research offered detailed accounts of the difficulties they faced on their arrival. Many had to surmount the classic barriers which confront all migrant women, such as lack of native language skills and knowledge of the system, problems with childcare, administrative status and lack of money. In this section, I have chosen to quote some of these stories, each shaped by the

particularities resulting from their different contexts. Nadia, for example, described her initial reaction on arrival in France thus:

*I spent the first year crying and hoping to go back every day... Meanwhile, I joined groups and organised debates on the situation in Algeria, seeking help from French intellectuals and politicians. I was not here to stay, and above all, I was not looking for a comfortable life here. We were only here for peace: 'ehrabna' ['we ran away']. One year passed, and I was still hoping to go back to my job in Algeria, but things were getting worse over there. At some point you tell yourself: you can't stay like that, you need a job.*

Abdelmalek Sayed (2004), in his work on Algerian migrants in France, calls this feeling of entertaining the hope to return any day, the 'double absence' – the eponymous title of his book. Nadia's story of fleeing Algeria was very specific: as seen above, her departure involved the intervention of high-ranking members of the Algerian and French governments. She recounted that when she arrived in France she seized the opportunity to organise meetings and to speak out about the horrors she had witnessed in Algeria. It is very common for forced migrants to develop a feeling of guilt for having left friends and family members to face the situation they have fled, and to wish to contribute towards helping them in some way. For Nadia, speaking out was both a way to ventilate her feelings and affirm herself as a political activist. Several times during the interview she pointed out the importance of challenging the dominant discourse in France about the situation in Algeria at the time, especially on the question of 'who killed whom?' Nadia refused to fall into the trap of being stereotyped as a passive victim and oppressed woman when in fact she was a political activist persecuted because of her professional position and left-wing activism. Although engaging in political activities is very common behaviour for the majority of political exiles, it can be difficult for women to exert their agency on arrival, even for the highly skilled amongst them. This is due to many factors, the most common being barriers of language and culture. Nadia's almost immediate involvement in political activities, however, was not only facilitated by her knowledge of the French language and culture, but also by her network of French left-wing politicians and academics working in her field:

*France saw all of us arriving in one go [and] the French authorities panicked ... newcomers every day. My husband and I had a small flat in France, there was a queue in front of it and there was solidarity amongst us, but the French politicians, especially the French left wing, broke our networks of solidarity...*

Although France, due to its involvement in Algeria, had seen the crisis coming for years, it was not prepared to receive such large numbers of exiles in such a short space of time (Aggoun and Rivoire, 2005). Looking at the current Syrian refugee crisis, it appears that history is repeating itself; those western countries that implement foreign policies which create chaos in other countries, often forget that chaos inevitably results in high numbers of refugees at their borders. The fact is, however, already having accommodation in France made it easier for Nadia and her husband to act in solidarity with other comrades and colleagues arriving from Algeria. However, these acts of solidarity did not last because French politicians wanted to control the situation, expressing concern that the Algerian conflict could be transported to France with those fleeing into exile. According to historian Bernard Ravenel (1998), French politicians and intellectuals, including the left wing, held divergent views on the cancellation of the Algerian electoral process: the Socialist Party (PS) began to distance itself from the Algerian regime, while the Communist Party (PCF) continued to support even its harshest military actions against the Algerian people. Ravenel also reveals that the PCF had always supported the Algerian army and its military coups prior to the Black Decade. The left wing's differences around the cancellation of the electoral process in Algeria had repercussions on French migration policies, particularly in relation to those Algerians who arrived during that period. Nadia describes a situation of panic, particularly as expressions of solidarity among political exiles tend to lead towards political activism and debates, which France was not prepared to tolerate in the case of Algerians. In the UK, the government may have implemented similarly divisive policies, such as 'dispersing' refugees fleeing conflicts in the Third World outside London, often to isolated and deprived areas of the country .

Nadia spent a year publicising the horrors taking place in Algeria, all the while nurturing the idea of returning to the country (her reasons for not returning are explained

later in this chapter). She then realised that she had to find work, and naturally she thought of going back to the Paris laboratory in which she had worked while studying for her PhD a few years previously:

*They told me I was welcome, but to get [a salary] would depend on the paid positions decided by the central government. In other words, there was nothing for me. But I rejoined the lab anyway, and worked – as you would describe it in the UK – as a ‘volunteer’. When a paid position was released, it was given to a French local, a man, and much younger than me.*

Nadia had just experienced the multi-faceted discrimination of race, age and gender. She was forty years old when she arrived in France, and by now she had come to realise that she was in a much weaker position than when she had left the laboratory eight years ago. Added to which, according to a report on the politics of gender in France, French employers still perceive children as a barrier to employing women (Lepinard and Lieber, 2015). Neither can the presence of racial discrimination against Maghrebi-North African women in French academia be discounted (Lepinard and Lieber, 2015). This survey shows that up to a third of participants were refused a first job in their countries of migration because of their Algerian nationality. However, for the specific case of Algerians who had fled during the Black Decade, another factor has to be taken into consideration, as Nadia explained:

*Then I realised that we were all considered terrorists. So either they do not respond or they tell you that “[t]his is not Algeria”. They don’t even invite you for an interview. One day, the School of Medicine called me; it was through a friend who intervened for me. But then, guess what? I couldn’t take the job because we realised that my papers did not allow me to work.*

During the Black Decade, the GIA organised several attacks in France and murdered many French nationals living in Algeria because it was believed that France had supported the Algerian regime in its war against FIS and radical Islam. The most spectacular GIA



terrorist act occurred on 24 December 1994, when it diverted an Air France flight between Algiers and Paris, threatening to crash it in Paris. To give another example, on 25 July 1995, a bomb exploded in an underground station in Paris, killing four people and leaving 76 injured (Dejevsky, 1995).

The irony was, as she explained (above), that when Nadia was finally invited to take a job in a university medical school after three years of job-hunting, she realised that her immigration status did not allow her to work. This experience dealt a severe blow to her morale:

*I cracked under that pressure. One day I went to the prefecture [French local authority] and told them I was not leaving the office without a work permit; I made a scene. Then, surprisingly, someone came to see me, took all the information about my background, and provided me with a work permit, renewable every year. I remember ... a social worker [calling] at [my] home. I had to explain why I made that scandal at the prefecture.*

For Nadia, employment was a key factor for her feeling of integration into French society, as well as being key to regaining her independence and most importantly her mental and emotional well-being and sense of self. The psychological impact of exile on women such as Nadia is examined in a study by David Hayward *et al.* (2008, p.201), which defines the circumstances in which women try to adjust to their new environment, including their uncertain immigration status, at a time of “temporariness and precariousness [due to] their refugee situation”. Nadia told me with regret that she never worked in academia again, but what she laments most is that she has never had the opportunity to carry on with her research or publish her work. Like Nadia, many other participants felt it was necessary to re-establish their academic or high-profile careers, not only to give something back to their adoptive countries but to regain their lost identity as professional women.

In contexts other than France, various other factors obstructed women from resuming their original professions, as Khadidja, who now lives in Spain, explained:

*I have never been able to work as a journalist. There are so many reasons for that, but one of the most significant is because we have two children. Also, during the past decade*

*we moved a lot around Spanish territory and this instability, [without] a permanent location, was not conducive ... to re-building my professional career. We finally settled down in 2010, but the economic crisis in Spain from 2007 did not help us at all.*

For the majority of participants, the fact that their Algerian qualifications were not recognised and a lack of knowledge of the language of their new countries were the main barriers they faced to resuming their profession. As for Khadidja, her remark suggests there were other factors related to childcare responsibilities that prevented her returning to work after her complex and traumatising journey of migration. Mothers who are new to a city tend to have very little knowledge about the type of support available to them; this becomes even worse if they are new mothers like Khadidja, who describes the isolation she felt after giving birth to her first daughter. After receiving work permits, Khadidja and her husband moved across the country to wherever they could find jobs. Travelling from one place to another made it difficult for her to build any local connections with other Algerians who could have supported her.

Eventually, after a few years on the move, the family settled down in 2010. Sadly, although Spain had enjoyed rapid economic growth during the early 2000s, attracting many African migrants, the global economic crisis in 2008 badly affected the country, and the rate of unemployment increased until it was one of the highest in Europe. The high level of unemployment impacted migrants first, and within migrant communities, it was the women who were the most affected (Eurostat, 2014). Khadija, however, never gave up writing. At the time of our interview, she was writing a novel, the tragic story of a young Algerian woman from a rural village who dares to defy the patriarchal norms by pursuing a career in the theatre, and as a consequence, is burned alive by her brother. Khadija had heard of the story in Algeria, but she had never been able to write about what happened or grant the victim justice; the woman's family and the authorities described the murder as an act of terrorism and endeavoured to cover it up, along with many other acts of violence against women, including similar 'honour killings' in rural Algeria. By the time I was finalising this research, Khadija had published her novel in France, and thus she was able to speak out at last about the violence meted out to women in Algeria. Her fluency in English also gave Khadija the idea of opening a second-hand English bookshop.

An Algerian friend, who also participated in this research, was collecting donated books in the UK for this purpose and sending them to Khadija.

Other participants in this study experienced easier arrivals and adjusted more smoothly to life in their host country. The story of Louisa, who first fled to the UAE before moving to the US, spoke of what she termed a ‘good experience’, compared with others who went elsewhere:

*Because, you see, it depends on the country to where they have gone. After living in terror of being killed, paradoxically, I went to a country known for its security. The manner in which they speak to women over there was a big difference to what I was accustomed to from Algerian men.*

Louisa seems to have been agreeably surprised to discover that the stories of violence against women in Arab countries were partly due to widely diffused stereotypes. She also mentioned the amount of resources allocated to women-only facilities in every aspect of daily life in the UAE. She had to perfect her academic Arabic, as well as learning to adapt to a new working environment, but explained that there were resources and support available to help with her professional re-adjustment, and within only six months she started work as a journalist again. She and her family spent twelve years in the UAE, which she described as happy and financially comfortable, but “*when our daughter was growing, we started thinking about her future, her access to universities, etc. ...*”.

The Gulf countries, particularly the UAE, are known for not granting permanent residence or nationality to migrants, regardless of the time they may have spent in their territories. This discriminatory law was a constant reminder to Louisa of her temporary status and created a sense of living in limbo that was, perhaps, similar to Nadia’s, despite living in a different country under very different circumstances. Also, after having lived in the country for many years, Louisa realised there was in fact a great deal of discrimination against women, and all the attention displayed towards women that impressed her on her arrival was precisely part of this culture of gender discrimination. Added to this, her desire to see her daughter studying in a top-ranking university meant that as soon as an opportunity presented itself the family moved to the US.

Unlike Louisa, for the majority of participants, their Algerian qualifications were not recognised, and the survey revealed that nearly all of them had to apply to re-train or return to their studies. Some participants said the main reason they resumed their education was to improve their job prospects, while others wanted to perfect their knowledge, change careers or gain entry into the networks of professional bodies in the receiving country. One of the participants added the following comment: *“I wanted to deepen my knowledge, not only [in order] to work, but also for my personal development.”* As a result, many had to start their higher education from zero or qualify in a different field. This was particularly the case for medical doctors. Indeed, this study revealed that several doctors who migrated to countries other than France faced difficulties in pursuing their medical careers. As one participant, who now works as a counter assistant in a pharmacy in the UK, said: *“Algeria spent much money on educating us up to this level, but lost us. Unfortunately, with the non-recognition of our diplomas, our host countries will also lose us, and God knows they need doctors here.”* In London, I met a few Algerian women doctors who had migrated during the 1990s and were now working as consultants in teaching hospitals or as general practitioners in local surgeries, despite the stressful and expensive process of requalification. In the UK, the General Medical Council (GMC) requires that all non-EU doctors attain a very high score in the IELTS English examination<sup>13</sup> before they are allowed to sit the Professional and Linguistic Assessments Board (PLAB) examination.<sup>14</sup> All this often takes more than three years. A similar process was reported by participants living in Canada and the US.

Other participants wanted to regain the standard of living they had lost during their journey into exile, as one respondent explained:

*My degree was insufficient to find a good job with a good salary, so it was necessary to enroll for a masters when I arrived. However, regarding my PhD, I found it unnecessary, and would not advise any woman to go for it if she does not intend to work in academia*

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<sup>13</sup> See: [http://www.ielts.org/institutions/global\\_recognition/setting\\_ielts\\_requirements.aspx](http://www.ielts.org/institutions/global_recognition/setting_ielts_requirements.aspx)

<sup>14</sup> See: <http://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/plab.asp>

*again. It was a five-year waste of my life, but it was imposed by my family and I had to obey, unfortunately.*

This quotation intimates that undertaking further studies may have been a condition imposed by this participant's parents before she was allowed to prolong her stay abroad. In some cases, Algerian parents are held accountable by other members of their extended family for their daughter's 'conduct', and it is often considered unacceptable for a young woman to travel or stay abroad if not for the purpose of either further education or marriage. Other participants explained that the only motive for undertaking further education was to obtain an extension to their visa.

This section concludes with some telling statistics garnered from the survey: around one third (31.33 percent) of participants declared they had been discriminated against because of their Algerian nationality, but only seven percent said they experienced gender discrimination when applying for jobs or training. Ten percent said that their administrative status at arrival was often a barrier to accessing education, funding and the labour market in general, but it depended upon the country to which they migrated. Lack of space, however, means that this summary cannot do full justice to the participants' various routes to finally achieving a successful professional life. Given the general discourse on migrant women, particularly those who flee war zones, it is highly likely that organisations and policy-makers overlook their aptitudes and fail to recognise their resilience and the positive ways they overcome their traumatic experiences. Yet, this study has revealed women's agency and ability to cope with suffering, and shows that, if given the right support, they comprise a positive resource for the countries in which they settle.

#### *Integration, language and identity*

The questions addressed below concern how participants negotiated their new identities, and the markers of identification they exploited to adapt to new, often hostile, environments. The narratives of these women illustrate just how essential it was for them to resume their work and retrieve their lost social positions, a process that involved re-inventing a 'self' and negotiating a new identity in a dialogical way (see the literature review in Chapter One). It is important to stress that in both the survey and the interview

process I have used the word ‘integration’ when describing adaptation in new environments rather than ‘assimilation’ due to the way the latter term is understood in countries such as France (Sayad, 2007). Studies on ‘identity’ necessarily have to consider the role of language, a form of communication that is uniquely human (Edwards, 2009) and therefore an essential underpinning of human society. Language is considered a vital tool, enabling individuals to access social networks. In this respect, the complex and intertwined issues of language and identity appeared to play a formative role in creating a sense of belonging, or otherwise, to the participants’ new social and professional environments.

To the question in the survey regarding what languages respondents use to communicate with their family and their Algerian friends, more than a third (81 percent) replied that they used French, followed by Algerian *Derdja* (69 percent), English (43 percent), with Berber and Arabic at 18 and 17 percent, respectively. Respondents were allowed to choose as many options as they wished, which meant many of them were likely to be alternating between more than one language, mainly mixing French with *Derdja*. French was also the language they tended to use online, followed by English. Very few comments or articles were posted in literary Arabic. During at least two conferences in which I presented some of the findings of this study, I was confronted by two particular questions: why was French the dominant language used by the participants in your research, and why was the Arabic version of your survey not popular? These questions demanded an explanation. Although Algeria is a member of the Arab league, and Arabic is its official language, nearly all the inhabitants of North Africa, including Algerians, are assumed to be of Berber ethnicity. This contradiction reveals that language is often subject to a geopolitical logic. Louisa (mentioned above), for example, related her experience of exile thus:

*I am deeply Algerian but I am imbued with French culture; I am particularly open to modernity and knowledge. French is my ‘war booty’ and I am proud to call myself a Francophone secular Algerian woman who rejects obscurantist Arabism, which only brought us Salafism and terrorism.*

Like Louisa, the majority of participants were educated in French, at least up to high-school level, and also belong to the post-colonial generation of educated women who took part in the passionate political debates about socialism, Marxism, Berberism, Islamism and secularism that took place in universities and workplaces during the 1970s and 1980s. Like Louisa, the majority of participants also described themselves as secular. Secularism or *laïcité* is related to the French cultural touchstone of ‘liberty, equality, fraternity’, which was introduced into Algeria (and beyond) during the colonial period through the imposition of the French language and culture. In the process, the colonisers impressed on the minds of Algerians that French was the language of ‘civilisation’, representative of a ‘white culture’ far superior to that of the “black, barbaric, indigenous peoples” (Fanon, 1967). The use of the French language was enforced in the educational system, state administration and many other fundamental aspects of Algerian life. Any Algerian who did not adhere to the colonial culture and the principle of *laïcité* was portrayed as backward and uncultivated, lacking in scientific knowledge and rationality; a mindset that also regarded Algerian women as oppressed by their Muslim/Arabic culture. According to Malika Rebai-Maamri (2009, p.1), this was a policy of brutal acculturation, alienating Algerians from their cultural heritage by means of the imposition of French as the dominant language, ‘ousting’ indigenous languages such as Arabic and Berber.

The Algerian society was left deeply fractured as a result of this policy, and although the French language never had official status, it remained widely used in the majority of university and academic faculties, governmental organisations and NGOs, making it “de facto co-official” (Rebai-Maamri, 2009, p.2). Yet the use of French also persisted because most of the teachers, administrative personnel, public health workers and university lecturers were exclusively trained in French. As a result, the Francophones (French speakers), who regarded themselves as modern, rational and secular, clashed with Arabophones (Arabic speakers), who saw French-speakers as westernised and therefore a threat to the drive to re-assert an ‘authentic’ Algerian identity based on Arabism and Islam.

The clash deepened during the rise of radical Islam in the 1990s, when many Francophones became the target of terrorist attacks. Indeed, there is now a large body of opinion that argues that religion served as the grounds for the violence that followed the

cancellation of the election. Amine Maalouf (1998), however, is a dissenting voice; he asserts that the violence was more rooted in the conflicting linguistic conditions in which Arabophones, Francophones and Berberophones found themselves in post-colonial Algeria. For example, following the assassination by the GIA of acclaimed poet, journalist and author Tahar Djaout in 1993, a declaration by Arabophone writer Tahar Ouattar deepened the conflict. Benrabah Mohamed (2013), in his work *Language Conflict in Algeria: From Colonialism to Post-Independence*, recounts that when asked if he thought the death of Djaout was a loss for Algeria, Ouattar answered: “It’s a loss for his family first and for France.” Of course, this is not to say that all Algerian Arabophones are religious fundamentalists or adhere to radical Islam; the best counter example is the Arabophone feminist writer Ahlem Mosteghanemi (1993), who strongly criticised the failure of post-colonial politics to address the fraught subject of cultural identity, belonging and language.

This research appears to confirm Maalouf’s argument. For Louisa, for example, language played a key role in introducing the notion of violence into Algerian society. Indeed, the first observation she made when she arrived in the UAE was that the Arabic language taught and spoken in Algeria failed to transmit the beauty of Arabic language and culture, which she only discovered once she was there:

*When I first arrived in the UAE, I received a linguistic shock to hear some beautiful Arabic expressions which I couldn’t answer: ‘habibty’ [‘my love’] and ‘habibt albi’ [‘the love of my heart’]. I had never heard these expressions in my Algerian-Arabic language. I didn’t even know how to respond to them. Algerians are wordless people when it comes to expressing love, not only due to a reserve but to a real lack of vocabulary. We don’t know how to speak about peace. All Algerians speak about is Gaza, war, etc. ... because all our references are about the moujahidine [the former combatants in the war of independence] and their exploits against France, and already in the semantics of the word ‘moujahidin’ we find ‘moujahid’ and ‘jihad’ – all that you hear is war and violence.*

Louisa seems to agree that the post-colonial regime confiscated people’s independence and its historical consciousness and replaced it with a new political consciousness, using



nationalism as a tool of social conditioning, translated through a language that always refers to violence and war. We may recall that Algeria remains the only country in North Africa, and perhaps in the whole region, to refuse to recognise the Israeli state; it has no diplomatic relationship with Israel. The ‘Palestinian question’ has been part of the political consciousness of all generations and political tendencies since before independence in 1962. The pro-Soviet Marxist nature of the Algerian regime after independence helped in maintaining this support, not only to the Palestinian cause, but also to other oppressed peoples, thus feeding the national debate with a language of resistance that is, according to Louisa, often violent. As throughout the MENA region, Palestine has not been spared the rise of religious fundamentalism, and Gaza itself is now governed by an Islamic religious party, Hamas.

Apart from the fact that Louisa needed to fit into her new environment, she had also suffered from radical Islam in Algeria, and this no doubt predisposed her to absorbing the influence of the global media with its often biased reports on Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation, described as ‘terrorist attacks’. In most parts of the world, the bipolar political debate has been transformed from left vs right to secular vs religious, giving birth to the new lexicon of *jihad*, *jihadism*, *moujahids* and *moujahidins*, with all its terrorist connotations. Louisa explained that the etymology of the words is the same, arguing that although this was the language of those who liberated Algeria from colonialism, it now only produces violence. While Arabic was the language of resistance against the French occupation, French in turn became the language of resistance against obscurantist radical Islam during the Black Decade and afterwards. After explaining that many French-speaking intellectuals and French teachers, including women, were persecuted and assassinated by the GIA, or driven into exile during the conflict, Nadia said that during her last trip to Algeria, she discovered the spread of a new language she did not own:

*You’ll read written large on the facades of their houses and businesses, ‘koulou hada biidniallah’ [‘all this is with permission from God’]. And you hear [the term] ‘mashallah’ [‘thankfulness’] everywhere. Those ‘oumi’ and ‘abbi’ instead of ‘baba’ [‘dad’ in Algerian] and ‘yemma’ [‘mum’] – this language is not ours.*

According to Martin Stone (1997, p.193), the radical Islamists who appeared in the late-1980s “used strategies and tactics identical to those of the wartime *moujahidin* who had defeated the French”. However, unlike the resistance struggle, supposedly influenced by anti-colonial philosophers such as Franz Fanon, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, the new ideological force that drove the anti-intellectual violence during the Black Decade was influenced by a radical form of Islam that portrayed secular Francophones as enemies of their political project – that is, the institution of an Islamic state in Algeria. This may explain why the participants in this study are mainly Francophones, as well as their ability to adjust and adapt to their new western environments, since they consider themselves as speaking a western language, with all its related cultural, social and political implications, and this facilitates their adaptation.

#### *Narratives of regaining self-hood*

The participants of this research seem to have had little difficulty in finally achieving a sense of belonging to their new societies, despite the various forms of discrimination they faced. Those who migrated to France, in particular, felt no sense of ‘otherness’ since they considered themselves culturally French and well-equipped to merge into the French environment. The following quotations, taken from the survey, illustrate this. As one interviewee said: *“For me, when I left Algiers for Paris, it made no difference at all. Coming to Paris was like moving house within Algeria; I couldn’t consider myself as an ‘immigrant’, I had simply moved.”* Another participant, who also lives in France, pointed out: *“Being a Francophone, French culture was not alien to me. I think I was already ‘integrated’ before I came here.”*

The process of integration or adaptation cannot be dissociated from women’s sense of self and the re-construction of self in exile. This involves a dialogical process, with the feeling of belonging ‘here’ and ‘there’ at the same time. This two-way process is not only based on the migrants’ acceptance by their host societies, but also on their ability to ‘let go’ of their differences. Exile is a process that involves learning new customs, cultures and values without which it would be difficult to achieve a sense of belonging, a feeling that to a certain extent makes life easier and more satisfying:

*Integration for me is to understand the British culture, live the best of both cultures [Algerian and British], and respect British rules and customs. It is both ways, to give and to receive, to be open to other cultures and faiths, and to regard them as equal.*

This quotation also suggests that the migrant experience is an opportunity to place the self within a larger context. As stated above, and seen in various examples in this study, participants inculcate and exhibit certain universal values that they have learned in their day-to-day lives, although it has become common, when speaking of a sense of ‘transnational belonging’, to associate it with the movements of the elite or the highly skilled. As one of the participants pointed out: *“Integration is to show that the earth belongs to all, despite the controlling borders; competences [and skills] have no frontiers.”*

Khadidja, who lives in Spain, explained that although having children was at first a cause of isolation, later it became a key factor in making her feel that she now belonged in her new environment:

*I belong to my host country through several factors: my two daughters were born here in Spain. Their school [and] their friends [are here] and the mark of the family is on this [place]. And also I have a linguistic link with Spain that makes me feel closer to the society. It does not mean at all a loss of my identity, but the gaining of a new one.*

It is often the case that solidarity between women is built around parenting and childcare. Placing their gender above other identity markers, such as religion or nationality, mothers often share the task of babysitting when childcare provisions are not available. Khadidja described how she had made many friends in the locality through picking up and dropping off one another’s children at school. She stated that she has never missed a parents’ evening or any meetings related to her daughters’ education, and has attended birthday parties, school trips and other events. Khadidja, who speaks good Spanish, seems to have taken all the opportunities she could to establish friendships with the parents of her children’s classmates.

As mentioned earlier, Khedidja also planned to open a second-hand English bookshop – another opportunity to build a social network in the locality. Here, again, the importance of knowing the language of the host society was as an important factor for integration and the sense of belonging, particularly as it is very common that migrant mothers are often pushed into socialising with one another when their children are in the same schools. A Swansea University project on ‘Parenting in a Multicultural European City’<sup>15</sup> that I helped to co-ordinate in 2008 showed that schools in Europe often provide migrant parents with lessons in the country’s language. In the UK, for example, basic English and other literacy skills are taught in nearly all state schools, alongside other community projects aimed at empowering migrant parents, although this provision has now been compromised by funding cuts and the closure of free ESOL (English as a Second Language) classes. It is now generally recognised that mothers who are involved in their children’s schooling benefit from such programmes of empowerment. For this reason, the men tend to be excluded from this process, and as a result, women become more aware of cultural differences and start to challenge their own cultural norms, often rejecting patriarchal rules transposed from the culture of origin. Khadija went on to explain that, as a consequence, she had now re-invented herself, adopting a new identity without losing her original one; her identity was thus composed of her old and new self.

However, the survey also revealed that half (53 percent) of the participants considered themselves to belong to an Algerian network, although for two-thirds of these women it meant little more than meeting with other Algerian women and sharing experiences. Among other things, participants mentioned lack of time as one reason for not networking or attending gatherings. Often isolated from family and friends, mothers – particularly single mothers – struggle with childcare costs, as noted earlier. Added to which, rebuilding professional lives in a new environment is time-consuming and very demanding. Interviewees gave their answers greater depth by mentioning other perceived barriers to networking:

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<sup>15</sup> See: [http://www.swansea-arrivals.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=66&Itemid=101](http://www.swansea-arrivals.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=66&Itemid=101)

*Those illiterate [women] who came to the US with green cards have no jobs, live in bad areas and spend their time in Pakistani or Saudi Arabian mosques – that’s what you find most in the US. They have nothing to do with our Maghrebi sense of Islam. The wives wear the hijab, and the worst is that they influence the highly skilled women here. I’m sorry but I don’t feel any [sense of] belonging to this hypocrisy. I don’t trust an Islamist whatever [their] level of education. I don’t get together with anyone. I have so many friends in the grave today and [undertook] that entire, cruel journey into exile because of ‘them’. So I prefer to keep away from ‘them’.*

Louisa’s quotation reminds us again of the current debate on political Islam and its effects on Muslim communities in the west, particularly when terrorist acts are committed in the name of Islam. Although Louisa was one of the few who mentioned this issue, members of the *Algerian Women Diaspora* Facebook network discuss it on a daily basis. Following the terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015, Algerian women living abroad and particularly in France, at least those who considered themselves secular, were often put in the difficult position of having to dissociate themselves from their communities, members of whom were often wrongly stereotyped as radical Muslims. The subjectivity of this process can make it problematic to negotiate belonging to a host society that does not see any difference between secular and non-secular Muslims, and which considers all Muslims to be a threat to its national identity and internal security.

Several studies highlight that a particularly important point to explore in relation to highly skilled migrants is the development of their professional identity and the construction of new professional careers, and the direct influence this has on their level of integration and contentment. For example, Jacqueline Taylor (2008, p.3), who has researched the implications of the term ‘professional identity’ or ‘occupational identity’, stresses the “important relationship between the occupations that people engage in and the construction, maintenance and rebuilding of a coherent and satisfactory identity”. Several participants in the survey declared that they needed to develop their professional identity in order to feel a sense of belonging to their new societies, because career and life satisfaction are interlinked and can be a good tool for measuring happiness, and the creation of a strong vocational identity acts as an important mediator. One of the

respondents commented that she had left Algeria only to further her knowledge and career in the field of philosophy; she had always dreamed of eventually becoming an academic researcher: “*I used to dream of Kant, Plato and the Agora square. In Algerian universities, I found myself trapped in poorly transcribed theories.*” After completing her PhD, she found work as a lecturer and researcher in a university in Belgium, where she feels fully integrated. This participant also pointed out in the survey that she had no intention of returning to Algeria, a question that will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

It is necessary to emphasise here that Algerian academia has never been open to debates on current social and political issues. For many Algerians of my generation, including participants in this study, there was (and still is) a stigma against the humanities, including philosophy, literature and the social sciences, which are considered unsophisticated subjects in comparison with the hard sciences and medicine. The selection of candidates to study science and medicine was made fully two years before entering the last year in secondary school to sit the *baccalaureate*, and it was mainly based on the marks a student achieved rather than their aspiration to study a particular topic, so anyone who obtained average or below-average marks was oriented towards literature, social sciences and law. Even worse, during the 1980s, these subjects began to be taught in Arabic, which made them more susceptible to links with radical Islam, further deepening the ‘primitive’ stereotype, while hard sciences and medicine were mainly taught in French, making them more susceptible to association with French culture and secularism. This has not only helped to feed the conflict between Francophones and Arabophones mentioned above, but it has also encouraged a politics of social exclusion based on academic pathways and subjects.

Karim Khaled (2014) excludes violence as a factor in pushing academics and intellectuals to leave the country during the Black Decade. For him, the reasons behind the mass exodus of the highly skilled during the 1990s, regardless of their gender, particularly those who migrated to France, are twofold. The first is that migration expressed socio-political opposition to the authoritarian regime and its dominant policies, characterised by the ideology of a single-party state. The second is that it was also a protest against the exclusion of academics and experts from the management of the country’s affairs. The fact is, generations of academics have had to endure bureaucratic and

centralised oversight of their research projects and publications, and most importantly, of the attribution of funding to attend conferences and other scholarly events. As a result, the main vocation of the university was distorted – no longer an open environment for research and academic debate, it turned into a heavily censored space.

Khaled (2014) argues that, for a long time after independence, the remuneration of Algerian university lecturers and researchers was similar to that of civil servants, and they were only required to teach and reproduce the ideology of the ruling party (the FLN). In addition, despite changes in governance since independence, patriarchy arguably remains the focal culture in many Algerian institutions, including academic institutions. The following quotation, taken from the survey, is a good illustration of this: *“I came here because in Algeria I couldn’t study photography. Researchers are forbidden to study [the work of] photographers such as Hamilton, and other ‘erotic’ topics.”* According to the second volume of the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Women* (Smith, 2008, pp190-2), “the western meaning of the word ‘eroticism’ often refers to some of the most complex existential, political, artistic and literary dilemmas, as well as to a few of the most problematic debates of western philosophy”; furthermore, “eroticism is very often associated with the empowerment and liberation of women”. Thus, given the influence that radical Islam, grounded in an extreme version of patriarchy, holds in Algerian society today, it would be vain to hope for the introduction of such a sensitive and complex topic into the academic, let alone public, debate. Indeed, the respondent cited above is the one participant who declared her sexuality as lesbian. I have not been able to interview her but have had the opportunity to converse with her via the Facebook chat room, when she confirmed that her reason for leaving Algeria was both to further her studies and gain the chance to be open about her sexuality.

Participants also mentioned discovering new subjects of study once they had arrived in their host countries, including topics about which they already had some knowledge but were not taught in Algeria simply because of the lack of human resources and relevant infrastructure. The following remark describes such a situation:

*To work as a doctor [in France], you need continual updates, so I undertook complementary training [in] such [areas] as homeopathy, and facial and corporal*

*mesotherapy. I studied for a masters in obstetrics, and my PhD [was] on nutrition and obesity. I've attended several international congresses and seminars. My training as a doctor in Algeria was very good, but here I've widened my knowledge, learned lots more, because [the host country] has all the means needed to update knowledge in ... fields that have not yet been introduced in Algeria.*

This quotation refers, in passing, to how the ability to gain professional recognition in another country relies on self-motivation and often self-funding. Indeed, attending conferences and training, as this participant did, can be very costly. A point of interest here is the difference between participants who answered the survey in French and those who did so in English regarding the barriers they faced in accessing courses, training and the job market in their new environment: only eight percent of those who responded in French mentioned lack of funding as a problem, as opposed to 18 percent of those who answered the survey in English. It is impossible to draw a rigorous conclusion from this observation but it could be posited that these numbers may well be a reflection of the high fees both international and home students are required to pay to access higher education in the US and UK. It is beyond the scope of this research to look at particular cases, but from my own experience in the UK, undocumented highly skilled migrants, including those who have claimed asylum and are waiting for a decision on their claims, are required to pay international fees if they want to take a higher education degree. This has discouraged and excluded many women from undertaking postgraduate courses, despite their obvious academic ability.

The participant quoted above seems to have taken the opportunity to use all available resources in order to update and widen her knowledge. Whether for personal fulfilment or to help her job prospects, it seems that rather than restarting her medical studies again, she has found another route to realising her ambition: to work as a doctor and retain her previous professional identity. She cleverly chose to concentrate on the lucrative niche of alternative and beauty therapies. This has provided her with the ability to find a job without having to abandon her career as a doctor. For many others, however, the highest barrier they have to surmount is that their Algerian qualifications are simply not recognised, and there were some interesting quotes on this subject in the survey:



*“Diplomas obtained in Algeria are not recognised in the country where I live or any of the European countries”; “Do not deceive yourself, our diplomas are not accepted”; “The reason why I came to Paris is to ... study for a masters degree and receive quality training that will be recognised worldwide.”* This lack of recognition, whether in relation to their academic qualifications or their previous professional experience, was mentioned by almost all the participants in this research. The amount of frustration this subject appeared to provoke suggests that the reconstruction of the self in exile requires such markers of ‘recognition’.

### **The ‘myth of return’: missing home but where is home?**

The ‘myth of return’ is arguably the strongest defining aspect of a diasporic community (Clifford, 1994; Safran, 1991). The way members of a diaspora hold on to this myth is complex, and it mainly serves to maintain traditions built on solidarities. However, as Stuart Hall (1995, p.629) says, members of diasporic communities also realise that they are not and will never be unified in the old sense, because they are irrevocably the product of “several interlocking histories and cultures”, belonging to one but also at the same time to several ‘homes’. This is confirmed by one of the participants, Sonia, quoted at length in Lamia’s case-study (Chapter Five), who admits that she finds whenever she returns on holiday: *“Algeria [has become] a country that is hard to live in now.”* Sonia now lives in Canada where she works for a humanitarian NGO. Many other participants agreed with her on the fact that public services, for example, have dramatically deteriorated in the post-Black Decade era. In relation to the state of Algerian hospitals today, four participants evoked chronic illness as the main barrier to their return.

Thus, although nearly all the participants in this study (82 percent) declared that they miss Algeria, only a third considered eventually returning, while two-thirds said there were too many barriers in place, the main ones being social, political, economic and domestic. More than two-thirds (78.16 percent) said, of all the barriers they faced to returning, the first concerned the social environment and private life. The amendments to the Family Code in 2005 were supposed to have given women greater freedom; however, there is a lack of awareness or understanding of the context in which they were made.

Hence, participants expressed concern about the lack of information and communication from Algerian consulates concerning the amendments and their impact on women's rights, particularly regarding women married to non-Algerians. The reality is that, in practice, many of the Algerian civil servants working in embassies and consulates remain deeply influenced by patriarchal ideology and do not implement this new legislation in a way that enhances the position of Algerian women living abroad. As a result, women may be reluctant to return to Algeria, as consulates are the first contact point between a country and its expatriate community, as illustrated in the following quotation from Louisa:

*We are scared to approach the Algerian embassy and consulate here in Washington because of their negative language. So you tell yourself: "Oh, ok, let's keep away from this, we don't want to reopen any pain or be reminded of the reality of what Algerian society has become today".*

In addition, participants frequently mentioned the 2005 Amnesty Law (see Chapter Five), which is often held responsible for driving Algerian society into the arms of a more radical kind of fundamentalism, as a barrier to their return:

*We [women] have not been consulted about the reconciliation; I am of course against impunity. That's why we have learned to be discrete over there, to look left and right and behind before walking anywhere. Now it's a bit safer, or at least there is no danger of death, I think.*

In general, participants showed an attachment to an 'imagined Algeria', which they identified with the sort of Algeria that women of their generation fought for and dreamed of: plural, tolerant, just and economically prosperous. It is this 'imagined Algeria' that they carried into exile and to which many of the women I met (and I myself) dream of returning. This is set against the Algeria some of the participants experience when they return on visits to the country:

*And you know what? This summer I was there and got out in Algiers. I was walking and suddenly felt a hypoglycemia: I'm diabetic. It was Ramadhan and everything was closed, everything, everything. I wanted a glass of water and it wasn't possible. They will never see me in Algeria during Ramadhan again. While in our religion you don't fast if you are ill, no restaurants are open [there], and if they see you take a glass of water or eat... I feel that even the democrats play the game [of the reconciliation law]. You should see how my family is watching me when I go there now! My sisters and I used to be left-wing activists; they all pray and fast now. They have forbidden too much now, too much.*

Nadia deplored the fact that, as she described it, radical Islam has now gained a hold over nearly everyone in the country, placing greater restrictions on daily life. She shows her disappointment that even close members of her family, who used to be left-wing activists and continue to claim adherence to democracy and secularism, now observe *Ramadhan* and practice a particularly strict form of Islam.

As well as actual visits to the country, on vacation or business trips, cyber facilities and online social networks allow frequent virtual returns to Algeria, sometimes several times a day, and this has made it obvious to many of the participants that the Algeria they dreamed-of no longer exists. This is illustrated by Louisa's comment: "*We can't return to Algeria anymore because we have adopted another way to approach life, and I don't want to disadvantage my daughter.*" According to these participants, and many observers, a sort of mutant Algerian society has emerged, one that faces great challenges in the reconstruction of its economy and identity, particularly given the current geopolitical climate in the region. The transitional governance of Algeria may have achieved more-or-less satisfactory economic results, but it appears to remain a country that is now 'alien' to those women who do not live there anymore, as Nadia demonstrated:

*One day, I went to order cakes and the baker told me: "Come back tomorrow after the Maghreb prayer." I said to him: "My watch does not indicate the time in prayers but in hours and minutes." I insisted and showed him my watch: "Look, Sir, it does not indicate*

*prayers [laughs], give me a proper time please.” He simply couldn’t answer, because you see, he didn’t even know what time the prayer was, because I’m sure he doesn’t pray himself. But everything has become linked to religion over there. What they want is to transform the language of Algerians, all you hear is ‘Inshalla’, ‘Bi-idni Allah’ [‘God’s will’]. They have the laundered money from terrorism, and they have [built] shops and big villas now [and] you’ll read written large on their facades, ‘koulou hada biidniallah’ [‘all this is with permission from God’].*

Here, Nadia gave concrete examples of how she sees changes in today’s Algeria, both in relation to the implementation of the Amnesty Law, which allowed terrorists and wrongdoers to escape accountability, and to the rise of what she sees as backward behaviour and a ‘strange’ religious language introduced in the name of Islam. Not only Nadia, but many Algerian women I have met during the course of this study, think that there is a loss of spirituality in favour of a series of prohibitions that are alien to the former version of Islam known in Algeria. Participants have almost all grown up in families who practiced Islam, but they have now adopted secularism, rejecting the radical practices that have mainly emerged from a version of Islam known as *Salafism*, believed to have been imported to from Saudi Arabia. This may not of course be representative of all Algerian women living abroad, but it could be argued that it is the case with many of those highly skilled women who fled the country during the Black Decade.

Algerian public opinion appears to hold two views on returning migrants. The first is materialistic in that it considers mobility as a marker of a high status; migrants are rich and come back to show off their wealth. The second is more concerned with social behaviour and considers that migrants, particularly women, adopt arrogant attitudes towards their indigenous culture and habits. It seems that Nadia experienced both views. However, despite her strong criticisms of Algeria today, she is one of the very few who voiced the idea of returning:

*I agree that we should think about our future; we can't stay here for ever. However, we can still perceive [over there] the high cost of the Black Decade. Have you been to mental health hospitals in Algiers? All the kids who witnessed their parents' beheadings and other violence are now traumatised young adults ... This is only what is visible. Whether by murder or by exile, Algeria has lost the majority of its intellectuals, those who [wish] for the good [of Algeria], those who love the country.*

Nadia's desire to return is undermined by concrete facts. First is the lack of mental health care provisions for those who witnessed the horrors inflicted on their parents during the Black Decade. They are now aged between 25 and 35, and are a part of the age group that constitutes the majority in Algerian society. Nadia went to visit mental health hospitals because she plans to set up a company specialising in providing care and support to women with complex health needs, including mental illness and learning disabilities, on her return home. However, she denounced the bad governance, corruption and favouritism that are now affecting every section of Algerian public administration and higher education institutions, including access to medical schools and academic departments formerly known for their integrity. It may be that she was referring to these scourges of good governance when expressing the belief that only a small part of the problem is 'visible'.

According to Nadia, those Algerians with honesty and competence were either killed or persecuted and forced to flee during the Black Decade. From her point of view, those who now govern Algeria do not want the best for the country. As mentioned earlier, Nadia holds a doctorate in chemistry and formerly was head of a school of medicine in Algeria; she now works as a secondary school teacher in France.

*Also, I haven't published any work in my field for so long, so the Ministry of Higher Education will never hire me again there. I've heard that they have special rules for [those of] us who were forced to leave during the 1990s, but up to now nothing concrete has been done.*

Nadia, therefore, realises that she has not been able to rebuild her academic career and this prevents her from assuming the same position she had before she left the country. As explained in the literature review in Chapter One, there are no official statistics on how many academics left during and after the Black Decade. By academics, I refer to those who occupied a post as a lecturer, senior lecturer or professor. However, Nadia also revealed:

*We've heard of a circular from the Minister of Higher Education that all those who left during the Black Decade will be [re-instated] ... if they so wish; those who were forced to abandon their positions. Me, I left within 24 hours, they knew it. I was the director of an important institution. In 1994, when I was there, I received a call from the [person] who later replaced me to tell me: "Listen, I cannot cover you any further, you must resign from the post." It was a special situation where everyone was leaving [tears] ... but I said, ok, [so long as] my resignation frees a paid position for another competent person. We all resigned, as you know; we were forced to do so.*

Nadia was not able to verify if the person who replaced her was competent or not. She is sad that she lost her identity as a director, which she was unable to replicate in France, and she is also aware that even if she returns to Algeria, she will never be able to work in the same position.

According to the survey, more than two-thirds (84 percent) of respondents paid short visits to Algeria between 2013 and 2014, but the definitive return is "the myth that not always happened"; however, it is this myth that facilitates the creation of "diasporic consciousness over time and across generations" (Abdelhady, 2011). The following quotation from the survey is an apt illustration of this:

*It seems to me that women have to be twice as strong and aggressive to live in Algeria. It's also not easy when you are a single woman. A married woman is more acceptable, socially*

*speaking. Being a woman in Algeria is a daily 'combat'. After four months there I realised I wasn't ready for that, so I came back.*

Amine Maalouf (1998) contends that many of us would reject our inherited conceptions of identity, to which we adhere through habit, if only we examined them more closely. Participants in this study know that the future of any society now depends on accepting each other's identities, while also accepting the need to be recognised in turn as an individual. They also appear to be aware that their identities comprise a rich mixture of different senses of belonging; some are linked to the particularity of Algerian history, its struggle for independence and the different post-colonial stages of consolidating new national values, and others correlate to their religious, as well as their Berber and Arab heritages. An Algerian is composed of all of these influences. Maalouf (1998) explains that from the moment one begins to acknowledge and believe that one is made from these very rich components, one can approach 'others' with values based not on nationality and religion or race but on other, intrinsically human values. As a consequence, a more serene relationship with 'others' is created. We find, henceforth, amongst 'us' there are people with whom we do not share any values, and amongst 'them' there are individuals with whom we can feel very close.

Maalouf (1998) also argues that migrants who are aware of this are now in their millions worldwide, and their numbers are growing. Together they are creating a 'cultural melting pot' and a new conception of what identity ought to be, which enables them to embrace their host cultures without friction. Being on the edge of two or more different communities, often with contradictory values, they can play a key role in building bridges between these communities and become the 'cement' of the societies in which they live. This argument is made concrete in the following quotation from Louisa, who previously said that she would not return to Algeria but, nonetheless, holds strong ideas on how to fix some of the country's social problems:

*I have absolutely no pretensions to say: I know better. The person who challenges me always teaches me a lot, and so I've learned a lot. I always try to project the best image*

*– it's not even the best image, it's my image. But [Algeria], where to start from? In post-colonial Algeria, the notion of love was destroyed. We do not love each other, we haven't learned how to love each other; very few Algerians are conscious of that. I only want us to learn not to keep our heads down. We can become ... valued like all other societies, because reconciliation starts with loving yourself, and so the image you are offering to others is beautiful. It's a way to say to others: "I love you, and that's why I'm offering you my best image." You will also talk with serenity. It's a process of learning, you see ... and when you start talking with serenity, then contact with others becomes so easy it is not a confrontation anymore.*

It is salutary to recall that Louisa fled persecution in Algeria, where she was on the 'death list'. At the beginning of the interview, she described exile as either heaven or hell. She also confessed that it was only when she read about my research and when I asked her about returning to Algeria, that she realised that during her 20 years of exile she had gained better communication skills and more openness towards other Algerians. The counterpart of this, she believes, is a process of learning how to value yourself, to reach the serenity that enables you to share the best of yourself. She wants to transfer this understanding back home, a place where memories seem to have remained frozen in turmoil, conflict and hate.

As Maalouf (1998) explains, those who lack the ability to assume their own diverse identity markers find themselves excluded, or isolated and discriminated against in the societies where they live. They will try to avenge themselves against those who practice discrimination, and will harbour thoughts of self-hatred and hate towards others, leaving them open to extremist ideas – a hatred of which history has given us too many examples (Maalouf, 1998, p.46). It would be too easy to conclude that Louisa's exile is a paradise, particularly in comparison to nearly all the literature on exile which presents it as a time of misery (Sayed, 2004). Nevertheless, no one has the right to deny Louisa her happiness and her resilience in learning how to overcome the harsh side of being forced into exile, to work on herself and extract the best out of herself, and then to offer it to others.

In this regard, I would like to add that many of the participants in this research, and other women survivors of the Black Decade whom I have met during the last few



years, support the idea of the urgent need to inculcate a transnational character, based on universal human values, regardless of religion and discriminatory immigration policies. It does not matter to them whether this vision is shared with Algerians or with others, as long as the positive benefits are shared by all in their new communities, which in turn need to show recognition of their contribution. As one survey participant remarked: *“To integrate is to make friends, to contribute to the host community with new things [we] can offer, and to be recognised for that.”* Needless to say, the ways in which migrants contribute to all aspects of the daily life of their new societies are countless, despite the overwhelmingly negative media representations. Nevertheless, for this participant, her ability to integrate and make new friends, despite the hostility she has experienced in her new homeland, rests on receiving recognition and acknowledgement of her contribution to society. The various examples cited above show that integration or adaptation is thus a dual and dialogical experience. Media owners and policy-makers have powerful tools at their disposal that could, if used positively, represent migrant women’s success in a way that benefits both their new societies and their countries of origin.

In terms of seeking to establish ties with others Algerians, it is interesting to note that the type of gatherings the respondents seem to prefer are mostly (88 percent) cultural, followed by private and familial, and in equal number, academic talks, conferences and seminars (59 percent). Participants do not aspire to only meet Algerians of the same gender, but prefer those sharing their political views. As Feroudja explained:

*We [secular feminists] have not fallen, because we fought, although we failed, unfortunately. But I’m convinced that our struggle will [continue] in the future. I’m deeply committed to secularism because, as you know, in Algeria we need to bring reason into religion; we must read and listen to such people as Mohamed Arkoun. The Maghrebi feminist movement has conducted a great battle on this. I refer to Latifa Lakhdar ... although we declare ourselves to be secular, we all need to help bring reason into religion.*

Feroudja hopes to see reason return to religion in a future Algeria. She appears to believe that it is the only way to oppose organised violence perpetrated in the name of Islam, and suggests a better interpretation of Islam can be found in the work of the renowned Algerian

secular scholar, Mohamed Arkoun (2002), and one of his followers, the Tunisian feminist Latifa Lakhdar (2002, 2007), who, according to Wassyla Tamzali<sup>16</sup> (2014), dominates the contemporary debate on Islamic thought.

Tamzali (2014) reinforces Feroudja's argument; both insist that secularism is the only way for the Algerian people to live together in peace again. Yet, many of the participants in this study appear to have come to the realisation that it is perhaps patriarchy that is the main issue that impedes the implementation of gender equality in Algeria. Although patriarchy is alive and well all over the world, not all patriarchies are alike and cannot be compared with the particularly harsh Algerian version (Knauss, 1987). Equality is, on the one hand, guaranteed by the Algerian Constitution, but on the other it is jeopardised by an article in the same constitution that states that Islam is the religion of the state. Indeed, as seen in Chapter Three, the Algerian reservation on the CEDAW, particularly Article 2, suggests that it places Islamic law above any UN instruments of international human rights. As Feroudja explained: *"Equality is a basic principle of human rights, which cannot be spewed [out]. It is the minimum requirement if one has to take the decision to go back home."* Another participant, Wahiba, added a comment to the question on why she cannot think of returning: *"Because of the 'hogra' – a word that you can't translate into any other language because it only exists in Algeria."* The word 'hogra' describes the social and institutional injustice and discrimination which hampers women from fully participating in public life (Roberts, 2003). Participants sometimes compared Algeria in this respect with its neighbour, Tunisia. As one participant remarked: *"After living in Tunisia for more than three years, I realised the impact of Islamism on my society."* Regarding return, she pointed out:

*I signed a contract with the Algerian Ministry of High Education to return after my PhD, but I would like to add this comment: today, women are judged according to the values Islamists oblige them to conform to, rather than to what the real Algerian culture is, and*

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<sup>16</sup> Wassyla Tamzali is an Algerian writer, lawyer and feminist. I recorded her speaking at a seminar organised in Oran, on 27/10/2014, prior to the Congrès International Féminin pour une Culture de Paix Parole aux Femmes, Oran, 30/10/2014.

*when I [go there] and walk outside at 7pm in [my city], many men ask me to go in their cars to give them pleasure ... so my ideas [about] return are mixed.*

This participant wears the *hijab* but still experiences sexual harassment if she happens to be on the street at a certain time of the day and in certain areas of Algeria, as if she were trespassing in a space owned exclusively by men. During my last two visits to universities situated outside Algiers, I asked if female students can stay late in the library whenever they need to, something we certainly used to do before the Black Decade. The answer was “definitely, no” because of the harassment, which takes place regardless of whether women are veiled or not, are students or not. Marnia Lazreg (2009) argues that the conception of the veil as a means of preventing sexual harassment is a myth, with its roots in the same argument that blames rape on the way women dress.

The opening of a democratic window of opportunity with the Arab Spring, triggered by the so-called ‘Jasmine Revolution’ in Tunisia, revealed the extent of patriarchal norms that were prevalent in Tunisian society. I learned later from the Facebook account of another participant, an Algerian feminist, who as a union activist had fought in Tunisia to make the government lift its CEDAW reservation, that she had decided to return to Algeria after experiencing the Tunisian transition to democracy, which in her view was successful. She now works as a university lecturer on a topic related to gender studies. Indeed, transferring skills on gender equality learned abroad to Algerian academia, and to society as a whole, remains an imperative challenge, whether or not those undertaking it physically return to the country. The following statement from Wahiba is very explicit about this particular challenge:

*Returning back [home]? I feel times have changed in Algeria, women are [fighting] for change and claiming their rights, even if it's very hard ... You know, it's a struggle. I also don't want to impose my feminism onto other Algerian women, but just to show them that freedom does exist, you don't have to take off your veil or go out every night, you can just be free within your mind for a start, because freedom is first of all a state of mind.*

Wahiba hesitated about returning ‘home’ and nurtures conflicting ideas on what Algerian women have achieved today in terms of obtaining their rights and the freedom to make use of these rights. I have argued elsewhere that Algerian women have recently been able to make their mark within the professional and academic spheres (Guemar, 2012), despite an increase in wearing the veil, a condition they are forced to comply with if they are to enter the public arena. Wahiba, meanwhile, expressed sympathy with her compatriots, both in Algeria and in her current surroundings, telling them that it is necessary to achieve internal freedom in order to break free of the obstacles to external freedom. There is now a growing body of opinion amongst women’s rights advocates that argues that freedom for women should not be defined from a purely western feminist viewpoint, which demands that women should refuse to wear the veil and should socialise in public. Wahiba similarly believes that women’s rights may be hard to attain in Algeria but the struggle should continue and should be supported from outside, although only insofar as this is not perceived by women in Algeria as an intrusion into their internal freedom to feel secure and content in the context in which they live.

The subject of the ‘myth of return’ is thus often difficult to concretise. Returns, real or virtual, and projects that engage with ‘home’, depend on the establishment of a diaspora. The following section is an investigation into the network of highly skilled women revealed during the course of this research in order to ascertain whether its members consider themselves as belonging to a diaspora.

### **An Algerian women’s diaspora: other perspectives**

The survey reveals that 57 percent of the respondents considered themselves to be part of an Algerian network, and amongst these, more than half (75 percent) declared that belonging to a network meant to be part of a community, and 87 percent said they used this network to meet other Algerian women to share experiences. During my fieldwork, I also asked my interviewees about their perception of the existence of a diaspora of Algerian women. The majority of participants, although they said they believed such a diaspora does not exist, agreed there is an urgent need to establish one. What follows is an interesting comment from Feroudja, who now lives in France:

*No, there is none. However, there is a will to establish a diaspora, there is a will to do something for Algeria, but there is always something there to obstruct the transmission of solidarity mechanisms between women. The Algerian regime manages this division wherever Algerians are through [its] consulates, embassies, fake diasporic organisations, etc.*

This suggests that the Algerian regime may consider diasporic networks a threat. Feroudja explained that, after all, the idea of an Algerian nation was born in France within a network of anti-colonial Algerian migrants, and that is possibly why, whenever an initiative has been taken to establish one, it has been regarded with suspicion by the Algerian authorities, as a potential threat to the established order. She also denounced the lack of solidarity between Algerian women, whether they are in Algeria or living abroad: *“There are constant rivalries to gain the empathy of a ‘male’ in order to survive, and that’s how jealousies are [created]. It destroys the sisterhood [and] solidarity.”* Feroudja described herself not only as an Algerian academic but also as an activist and feminist who, despite being retired, in a mixed marriage and living in a small city in France, continues to be very knowledgeable on current women’s rights issues in Algeria and elsewhere.

Wahiba, who lives in the UK and works in banking, writes a blog dedicated to Algerian issues. She explained how pleased she is to see that her blog is mainly visited by women, although there are men who have also voiced their admiration of her outspoken style and provocative topics. Wahiba recounted:

*I started [the blog] maybe because I was like you, hunting for a diaspora. Are there any Algerian women out there? And it turned out that, yes, there were many... They started to pop up like mushrooms, saying: “Oh my God! There are Algerian women who can write well, and are well educated!”*

It is possible that the last remark was forthcoming simply because it contrasts with many of the Algerians in the UK who are undocumented and often uneducated. Wahiba assumed that, in contrast to other countries, the Algerian women in the UK were not connected to

each other: *“Generally speaking, there is a diaspora but no solidarity which is the main issue.”* She explained that the women she knows are *“all very highly qualified, or they are still students, or have finished [their studies] and are now working”*. Like Feroudja, she mentioned *“the sense of mistrust among us Algerians”*. She explained that women do not want to see each other because they are afraid of the ‘evil eye’ – that is, the jealousy their successful lives might provoke. The other interesting point she made, which I have myself verified, is that some Algerian women prefer not to meet with their compatriots because of the judgmental positions they tend to hold on each other’s behaviour:

*Many have now started drinking [alcohol], or doing things that normally an Algerian woman shouldn’t be doing ... Oh yes, another point, Algerian women don’t trust Algerian men here, so [one of] the problems for creating a community is this: some women have been transgressing Algerian norms and have become rebellious.*

Similarly, for Khedija, it came as a shock to her to discover that although Spain was one of the preferred destinations of highly skilled Algerian women who left after the Black Decade (Labdelaoui, 2012), no network of solidarity has yet been established there:

*To my knowledge, there is no support network between Algerian women to facilitate their integration or in order to [help] find a job, or other specific help. It’s a real shame! I wish there was a meeting point or a support network for us, maybe it’s the right time to create one.*

Another participant returned to the point of the divisions amongst Algerians: *“It saddens and angers me: everyone is suspicious of everyone; it’s draining. We are the new Greeks, a people that thrive on drama.”* For ‘Fatiha’, a secondary-school teacher in the UK, suspicion and lack of trust are the main obstacles to establishing a network of solidarity between Algerian women in her local area. She also claimed that in the UK “most of the other Algerians” are ‘illegal’, not highly educated and tend to be “radical Islamists”. This

last point was also referred to in Lamia's narrative in Chapter Five. Meanwhile, other participants stressed the hard work they had to put in to rebuild their professional lives in exile, implying that establishing networks and attending meetings can be too time-consuming. Louisa, the journalist living in the US, described the many barriers she faces in meeting other Algerian women. They are as follows:

*We live in an exploitative society [and] it wants you to be involved only in American affairs. For example, when I wanted to establish a community organisation, I was told to only participate in local politics ... So if you want to be involved in Algerian politics, it can only be done during your spare time, and here, life is fast and hectic. You'll have to work very hard to afford this spare time. And then, you must find a good, solid group of Algerians, who are very committed to a specific cause. Unfortunately, this does not exist here. Speaking of our embassy, in this regard, I can only say that it is of no help.*

Louisa added later, "*I also tried to set up an Algerian womens' reading group, but believe me, it didn't work.*" Once again, this suggests that the experience of migration results in a greater awareness of the universality of many issues. Louisa's desire to establish an Algerian organisation which could engage in and cooperate with the local community's events, issues and welfare was undermined by the lack of help and support. She was told such an undertaking would only be possible if she could manage to find some spare time, which seemed an impossible task, given the pressures of work and the hectic pace of life. Louisa appears to criticise the exploitation of workers as well as the capitalist work culture in the US, in which working hours range from forty per week to sixty or more if the individual, regardless of gender, aspires to promotion (Gallup, 2014). In the same way as the other participants, if more pragmatically, Louisa denounced the lack of an existing 'solid network', to use her words, and echoing their complaints, she deplored the attitude and lack of support from Algerian embassies.

Maya, mentioned above, lives in France but appeared more concerned about the way the phenomenon of regionalism creates a further barrier to establishing a network:

*I am connected to a group of Algerian women intellectuals who fled here. We meet sometimes, but regionalism remains the main issue, as it was in Algeria. I remember once I invited the group for afternoon coffee. The discussion was around whose cake tastes better – the usual Blida versus Algiers [contest] – then whose dresses are the most beautiful, whose accent is classier, etc. The discussion quickly turned to [the question of] which region's women participated most during the war [against France], and suddenly it all became political, [revolving] around the Black Decade. In the end, no one agreed on anything. I became sickened [by it] and I just do my own work [now]. I may publish a book soon.”*

Maya's example shows that she was interested in organising a network of intellectual women amongst those who had fled to France. She intimated during the interview that not all who attended this afternoon gathering knew each other from Algeria. Regionalism is both a well-established way of networking and a scourge in Algeria, and is grounded in the country's system of post-liberation governance (Merolla, 1995); the particular network an individual belongs to is believed to be the main criterion for nomination to a high-ranking position in the government, and this attitude is then transferred to Algerians' social and domestic lives. The quotation above suggests regionalism even continues to affect the establishment of networks of solidarity amongst Algerian women abroad, at least in the French context.

On the other hand, in the UK alone, at least four networks have been created with the aim of transcending such divisions amongst Algerians, as well as to promote collaboration between transnational groups of Algerians, including those still in Algeria. These networks include, at a national level, the *Fédération Internationale de la Diaspora Algérienne* (FIDA) and the Algerian International Diaspora Association (AIDA), and other more local groups such as the Algerian British Connection (ABC), chaired by a woman, the National Algerian Centre (NAC), also with a woman chair, and the Algerian Solidarity Campaign (ASC). However, although these initiatives are commendable, in practice none can claim to have mobilised the energies and active participation of highly skilled Algerian women.



Another point of view was expressed by Wahiba, who described herself as a young British-Algerian feminist. During the interview she praised the courage of Algerian women in general: *“Algerian women are fighters and I have great respect for them; that’s why I never criticise them. They have enough stick ... Yes, I think there is an Algerian diaspora ... amongst women, at least in the UK.”* To prove her point, Wahiba asked: *“Was the ‘network bomb’ of the FLN not set up by a group of four young women during the Battle of Algiers?”* This episode of the Algerian war of independence was made known to the international community through the 1966 film of the same name. The attacks of 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq revived the popularity of this film in western countries. Wahiba believes that resistance is part of the historical consciousness of Algerian women, and that those women living in transnational spaces will overcome the barriers that obstruct their mobilisation and create a diaspora. Unlike other participants, although she voiced some hesitation, she believes that an Algerian women’s diaspora does exist in the UK.

However, at the time of writing, in February 2016, the Algerian regime introduced a new constitution. There was no consultation with those living abroad before its adoption. Even worse, two of its articles, 51 and 73, exclude bi-nationals, those with both Algerian and another nationality, from occupying senior positions in the state and civil services. Arguably, its adoption was mainly as a pretext to exclude those highly skilled Algerians who had been driven to leave the country from participating in a future government. Although some Algerians living in Paris, Washington, Montreal and even Algiers expressed dissent over these exclusionary articles, the introduction of the constitution failed to mobilise the thousands of Algerians who live abroad.

My research, therefore, revealed the existence of a wide transnational network of highly skilled Algerian women who left the country following the violence of the Black Decade. However, it is clear that a diasporic consciousness and solidarity between migrants do not develop spontaneously on arrival in the receiving country (Cohen, 2010), so it may be too early for this particular set of migrants to mobilise and create a diaspora. But the fact that participants responded so widely to my survey, and agreed to share their experiences, is a welcome sign that there is a will to establish networks of solidarity between women. The seeds for an Algerian women’s diaspora have now been planted.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has highlighted the reasons behind the migration of the participants in this research, and also analysed the data from the survey and discussed some of it at length. Cohen (2010) argues that similar experiences, including the most traumatic one of departure, shape the formation of diasporic identity, and indeed, as the fieldwork for this research suggests, many participants maintain solidarities that encompass transnational ties. In terms of their agency, they have for the most part been highly successful in their education and careers, and their participation in this research demonstrates that their network is specifically and de facto 'intellectual'. Many of the participants, because of their experience(s) of migration, believe they are now more mature and more capable of bridging the interests of their new societies and those of their home country; hence, they are prompted to advocate for better working conditions, less corruption, greater justice, and most importantly, gender equality in Algeria. Most of them have no wish to go back to live there, but they do desire to see political, social and economic change in the country. They faced challenging odds and had to deal with the problems of rebuilding their lives and professional careers in new and often hostile environments, yet it is noteworthy that most of these women did not want to be seen as passive migrants or oppressed women; they had actively built successful lives for themselves and felt they were now fully integrated into their new societies.

## **Chapter Seven: Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

This final chapter presents the conclusions drawn from an analysis of the research into those highly skilled Algerian women who fled the country following the escalation in violence during the 1990s. The research was based around a core case study (Lamia's narrative) and supported by the analysis of other participants' accounts, as well as those of respondents to an online survey and six years of observations, and in the process it revealed the existence of networks formed by these women. It proffers suggestions for further research into what might consolidate these networks in order to foster the sense of solidarity that is thought to be currently lacking amongst Algerians living abroad, and discusses the reasoning behind their description as a potential 'women's diaspora', in particular exploring the way that the relationships between the members of these networks, as well as their relationships with their new societies and with Algeria, are socially constructed. This has revealed the complexities of women's 'identity reconstruction' in exile and sense of belonging to their new societies. The resilience, agency and diasporic consciousness displayed by the participants require understanding, nurturing and supportive policies to help mobilise them to contribute to and fully engage with both their transnational space and the current social conditions in Algeria, whether they intend to physically return to the country or not. The chapter, therefore, concludes with some recommendations to policy-makers and organisations in both Algeria and the societies in which the participants now live concerning the establishment of a consultative mechanism which could successfully engage members of these networks – and migrant women in general.

### **Reflecting upon the use of the concept of diaspora**

The research also sought to investigate the extent to which the lack of freedom of thought, the restrictions associated with the Algerian Family Code, and the increased levels of violence against women prompted these highly skilled women to flee the country. It was also motivated, therefore, by the ambition to provide recommendations to those organisations that influence policies aimed at addressing the barriers such women face in rebuilding their lives in the countries to which they have migrated, as well as examining

the barriers they face if they decide to return to Algeria. This raised the question of whether or not such networks could act as a diaspora. For this reason, the chapter revisits the decision to use the term, particularly in light of the debate between traditional scholars of diaspora and the social constructionists' understanding of the concept as a social condition as well as a heuristic tool with which to explore and better understand the interactions between a group of migrants, its new environment and its country of origin. Here, the term was used not simply in a descriptive sense but as a concept permitting the study of the social interactions, identity reconstruction, sense of belonging and mobilisation of this particular group which is now located in transnational space outside Algeria.

The decision to use the concept of diaspora to explore the lives of this particular group of Algerian migrants was twofold. First, the highly skilled Algerian women I met, including online, at the time I was writing my research proposal, often expressed the urgent need to create an Algerian diaspora. What they meant by 'diaspora' was a network of Algerians who live outside the country but are still attached to and interested in its political, economic and social affairs. They believed such a network should also be a space in which the solidarity between its members would help them to adjust to and integrate into their host societies. The second reason was the assumption that there is no solidarity between Algerians living abroad, regardless of their gender or level of education. This assumption has been supported by a number of researchers who have concluded that an Algerian diaspora does not exist. Research on Algerian migrants has mainly been conducted in France; however, as this study points out, the post-Cold War situation and the eruption of new conflicts around the world, the emergence of new technologies of communication and the spread of the global market has both encouraged and facilitated a surge of population movement, and this means there is now enough evidence to show that migrants no longer necessarily seek out countries where they have cultural and post-colonial ties or existing personal or family networks. Hence, it is necessary to study Algerian migrants in countries other than the traditional locus of Algerian exile, France, and in this specific case the research has yielded some interesting results that do not fully accord with the previous consensus.

The traditional use of the concept of diaspora, however, has been criticised as an essentialist discourse based solely on ethnicity and nationality, disregarding other identity

markers such as gender, age or social class. This is the view put forward by the social constructionists who argue that a group of people may develop diasporic consciousness and political mobilisation based on these other identity markers (Anthias, 2008; Brah, 1996; 1997; Hall, 1993). I therefore explored the different contemporary definitions and uses of the concept as a social condition and a heuristic device to investigate the relationship amongst the group of women who participated in my research. As seen in the literature review in Chapter One, the existence of three essential criteria is assumed to be crucial when defining a group as a diaspora: first, the trauma behind the dispersal of the target group; second, the difficulty in adjusting to new societies; and third, the cultivation of the idea of returning home, whether this be an actually existing homeland or one that is constructed and imaginary. I considered that the concept is useful in both describing the wide geographical dispersal of female intellectuals and other highly skilled Algerian women and exploring their process of identity transformation and the reconstruction of their lives in their new societies. In the absence of official statistics on how many highly skilled Algerian women left the country during the Black Decade and its aftermath, however, I had to first reveal the existence of the group I intended to study and geographically locate potential participants. To this end, as explained in the methodology chapter, I used Random Driven Sampling (RDS), a method that combines ‘egocentric’ and ‘snowball’ sampling techniques based on referral from individuals to other people they are connected to (Heckathorn, 1997, 2007). This method helped reach 188 participants dispersed throughout 18 different countries. France, Spain, Canada, the US and the UK returned the highest numbers.

### **The role of feminist research in investigating an Algerian women’s diaspora**

Arguably, such an examination into the nature of these women’s lives in exile, and how they construct new identities in their new societies whilst maintaining continuity with their previous ones, can help advance our understanding of adaptation and shed light on how attempts to exert agency and resilience in order to achieve success in new and often hostile environments relates to the ‘myth of return’, as well as to how diasporic consciousness is developed and the way mobilisation of solidarity between the members of the group under investigation occurs. In order to investigate these questions more closely, this research

focused on in-depth interviews with some of the participants recruited through the RDS method using a feminist-based ethnographic approach.

My own experience of exile is similar to those of participants in this research; I am part of the network and it can be argued that the stories told in this thesis are the stories of 'us', the highly skilled, secular Algerian Muslims who, as women, experienced family restrictions, social and official discrimination, harassment on the streets and persecution by radical Islamist groups, which forced us to leave our professional positions, family, friends and homes to flee abroad. Consequently, my research is framed by a feminist approach, allowing the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the lives of my participants. As seen in the chapter on methodology (Chapter Three), this approach is above all focused on research into the lives of oppressed women, with the aim of improving their access to women's rights and to elevate their feminist consciousness. My political beliefs and emotional empathy were often central to the way I conducted the interviews with participants.

Among these interviewees, I found myself most fully engaged by the narrative of Lamia (Chapters Four and Five). Her story speaks of the various different issues experienced by a young Algerian woman graduate who first escaped her small village, and the social and family restrictions preventing her from accessing public space, working and exerting her citizenship, to move to the capital, Algiers. Unfortunately, as the country became engulfed in conflict, she also found that women's rights and freedoms were becoming equally restricted in the city. Lamia described most coherently the experience of many women who lived through Algeria's internal conflict and the horror of the Black Decade, including the reasons behind seeking asylum abroad. She fled as much from the harsh patriarchal restrictions and the discrimination and harassment she experienced as from the general atmosphere of terror, which she clearly describes as socially embedded. However, the daily fear of indiscriminate terror left her with traumatic memories of violence. Given how fully it appears to cover the key themes that emerged from the rest of the data, Lamia's narrative naturally became the core case study of this research. As mentioned earlier, the emotions and feelings shared between us during the interview process were present in my thoughts even during the time spent compiling and analysing

the data. Her narrative resonated as one about all of us survivors of the tragic Black Decade.

### **The elements of diaspora: trauma, adjustment and the ‘myth of return’**

There were several post-independence political events that left the majority of Algerian people traumatised in some way even before the Black Decade. Chapter Three examined the legacy of the dysfunctional relationship between the regime and Algerian citizens, which was exacerbated by the two military coups of 1962 and 1965, as well as by the experience of lack of freedom under nearly 30 years of one-party governance, and finally by the frustration caused by the annulment of the long-desired democratic process in January 1992. As seen in Lamia’s narrative in Chapter Five, the assassination of President Boudiaf in June 1992 also left Algerian society with a sense of collective trauma. The murdered president, who had been appointed by the same ruling elite that decided to cancel the electoral process, had been expected to restore stability and fight the corruption that was rampant amongst the members of the regime.

The rise of violence and insecurity provoked by the cancellation of the first real elections to be held in post-colonial Algeria was discussed in Chapter Three. It also gave an overview of the political and socio-economic environment which predisposed the country towards such conflict, namely the neoliberal policies imposed by the IMF and the World Bank, including the demand that Algeria engage in a democratic process alongside the introduction of market ‘reforms’ as a condition for financial assistance, including the rescheduling of its external debt, estimated at the time to amount to 26 billion dollars (Martinez, 2000). The result was the restructuring of national enterprises and the restriction of access to jobs in the public sector, the main provider of employment, intensifying the already existing inequality in access to employment, as well as social services, including housing for young people. Anyone without a good network or ‘*maarif*a’ with links to the ruling elite faced barriers to employment. These policies particularly affected women.

The first social explosion triggered by this situation occurred in October 1988, leading to the government’s decision to amend the Algerian Constitution to permit the creation of other political parties in a bid to replace the single-party regime. However, as

a consequence of the dictatorship and the lack of political freedom that had marked the post-colonial era, together with the strong Muslim character of Algerian society, the main beneficiary was the radical Islamist party, FIS, which won the local elections in 1990 and the first round of national elections in 1991. However, the research also revealed the existence of other identity conflicts that had been created during the time of French colonisation and which the Algerian state had continued to nurture, such as those between Francophones and Arabophones, and between secular and non-secular members of the population, particularly amongst the intellectual and professional classes. The rise in violence during the Black Decade deepened these conflicts. The cancellation of the electoral process marked the beginning of a war against civilians, with the assassination of intellectuals and the massacre of entire villages, which, coupled with deepening state repression, pushed hundreds of Algerians into fleeing the country. It is believed that the tragedy cost the lives of around 200,000 Algerians and many thousands more 'disappeared', while it also severely damaged the country's infrastructure (Le Sueur, 2010).

The violence increased the rate of feminisation of migration amongst intellectuals and highly skilled Algerians, which was particularly noticeable from the beginning of the 2000s onwards. There were several coercive reasons behind the research participants' displacement, ranging from the general climate of fear and insecurity, or persecution specifically directed against them or their immediate families, to social and familial repression. Some participants who had initially moved abroad with the aim of enhancing their skills, to take advantage of job opportunities or to pursue further education were unable to return due to the prevailing terrorism and insecurity. Thus, the fact that their decision to depart (or not to return) took place in an atmosphere of conflict and terror meant that the participants' experience of exile often displayed a traumatic character. This was illustrated by the interviews conducted for this study, and was particularly well expressed by Lamia's narrative.

The interviews therefore revealed evidence of trauma amongst those participants who experienced persecution, either directed against them or their immediate family members, or who witnessed terrorist acts. It further revealed the trauma related to the specific oppression and sexual harassment of women which increased during the Black



Decade. Moreover, both when fleeing the country and on arrival in the receiving country, participants faced the barriers of restrictive asylum and immigration policies. The general flouting of the international law protecting women who suffer gender-based violence, as well as the stigma attached to all newcomers from Algeria who are frequently regarded as potential terrorists, made it particularly difficult for women to obtain visas or to be recognised as political refugees once in the country of asylum. The experience of the international gender-blind asylum process is a traumatic event in its own right. The lack of administrative status for those who decided not to claim asylum was no less traumatic, as seen in the story of Khadija who moved to Spain.

Once they were living in their countries of migration, participants deplored the lack of recognition of their Algerian diplomas as well as of their efforts to adjust, re-invent new identities and build new lives. This lack of recognition often fed a sense of being unwelcome in their new societies. Although participants showed some degree of resilience and even obstinacy when it came to rebuilding their lives, particularly their professional lives, it was not without facing a high level of discrimination. The study revealed that women who grow up and live under harsh patriarchal rules bring resilience to any new struggle they face, if only by virtue of their gender. As they experience more personal freedom in the countries they migrate to, their struggle moves from their private to their public lives. The participants were all agreed that they now enjoyed more rights as women, and although the adjustment to their new countries differed from one woman to another, the majority appeared to now enjoy financial independence and have either widened their knowledge in the field in which they studied and worked in Algeria or requalified in another. It also appeared that due to their settlement in multiple locations, the nurturing of an idea of a 'homeland' is now negotiated in a transnational space, often virtually in cyberspace. Social networking sites such as Facebook are used to exchange ideas of resistance, scientific knowledge, music and recipes from Algeria, as well as information on political and social developments in the country. Participants also showed the desire to fully belong to the societies in which they now live, particularly those who live in France, as seen in Chapter Six. However, despite their fluency in the language and feeling fully embedded in the French culture of *laïcité*, or having previously completed their post-graduate studies in France, participants appeared to face discrimination when attempting

to access administrative status, work permits and the labour market. Other participants also deplored a lack of recognition of their efforts to adapt and integrate into their new societies despite the trauma that had shaped their journey.

It was during the course of my fieldwork that the full complexity of the relationship between the women I was studying emerged, both in their relationships with each other and in the way they individually attributed themselves an imaginary Algerian identity. Gender, political beliefs and exile certainly added to this complexity. Hence, I diverted my literature review slightly into exploring the historical context in order to better understand the intolerance and suspicion towards each other that exists among Algerian women, as this is a crucial barrier to sustaining networks and establishing a diasporic consciousness amongst any group of migrants. It has been suggested that this intolerance and lack of trust has been inherited from the experience of harsh colonial rule that excelled in deconstructing the Algerian personality and destroying existing solidarities and networks in Algerian society (Bourdieu, 2013). The post-colonial one-party state, often compared to the regime in the former East Germany, continued this destruction (Harbi, 1994; Evans and Phillips, 2007). Moreover, by making women subject to a discriminatory Family Code instead of a civilian code for all citizens, the post-colonial regime helped create and fuel separation, hatred and intolerance within an already divided society. Undoubtedly, these divisions and suspicions were transported as part of Algerians' emotional luggage during their journey into exile. The preliminary findings of my study revealed that this is evident not only in the context of the complex migration process of Algerian women to France, but is also representative of findings in Spain, Canada, the US and the UK, countries in which I conducted my in-depth interviews. However, careful attention needs to be paid in order to draw any viable conclusions; further research needs to be conducted in other countries to which Algerians fled during the Black Decade. Such research may also need to include both men and women, and those less skilled, in order to better understand how these identities shape the narrative of the Black Decade, the process of resettlement in new societies and the idea of return.

Lamia's narrative expressed the impossibility of healing, and of thus regaining a sense of positive identification with the 'homeland', without establishing the truth behind what happened and prosecuting the wrongdoers. It appeared that, for her, official

acknowledgment of the truth is an essential prerequisite to restoring dignity to the victims, their surviving families and the nation as a whole. Forgiveness from exile only seemed to be possible for Lamia on the private level. An important factor in accomplishing this personal process of 're-selving' was the attempt to re-establish a relationship with her father, especially when she learned that he was dying. She forgave him the punitive behaviour she had had to suffer at his hands before she left the country. However, Lamia's narrative, which was supported by those of other participants, showed that she refuses to forgive those responsible for the terrorist acts and other horrors perpetrated during the Black Decade until the truth is revealed and the wrongdoers brought to justice.

This brought to the fore the question of how forced exile relates to the idea of diaspora. Both involve the displacement of people who struggle to retain an identity with their original environment (Sullivan, 2001). Diaspora, however, concerns groups of migrants, while "in a very acute sense, exile is a solitude experienced outside the group" (Said, 2002, p.140). The difference between a diasporic state of mind and an exilic one is that the concept of exile often assumes that individuals hold to fixed, coherent ideas about their new countries and their original homeland, and are often "cut off from their roots" (Said, 2002, p.140), whereas the concept of diaspora challenges notions of 'home', borders and nation-states, while creating an imaginary homeland and cultivating a 'myth of return'. This research has revealed that very often, both states overlap with each other.

Furthermore, the research has shown the complexity of the relationships of the participants with present-day Algeria and with their peers still living there, whom they often appeared to believe to be either incompetent and corrupt or too traditional and overtly religious. It seems that the participants individually attributed to themselves the imaginary Algerian identity – democratic, liberated, secular – that they dreamed of possessing before being forced to flee. It therefore appears that, for the most part, they can only foresee the implementation of women's rights and gender equality in Algeria if the country pursues a policy of secularism. I would argue, however, that this is not necessarily what the majority of women living in Algeria aspire to. Hence, educational levels, age and political beliefs certainly add to this complexity of imagining an Algeria that never existed and perhaps never will. For example, Lamia mentioned several reasons why she feels

more at home in the UK and will definitely not return to Algeria. One of the main reasons is a residual fear of the security forces, particularly the police. She also mentioned the negative attitude of the incumbent Algerian president towards the families of the disappeared and those assassinated during the Black Decade, particularly in light of her belief in the need to reveal the truth about what happened and prosecute the wrongdoers before the nation can be healed. Other participants, such as Nadia, mentioned the fear she felt during her visits to Algeria on vacation when she encountered in the streets the self-same terrorists who had forced her to leave and who have since benefited from an amnesty applied without accountability. Participants deplored the fact the amnesty was implemented without consultation with those professional and politically involved women who had fled the country.

It appears that, regardless of the politics of race and gender in their new societies, networks of solidarity between Algerian women, when they exist, are not established with a sense of continuity with an Algerian identity. Instead, women have re-invented new selves and a new sense of belonging to a transnational space in which they have learned new life skills and, for now, have found sanctuary and a measure of peace. It has been suggested earlier that the intolerance, suspicion and lack of trust that often occur between Algerians living abroad were inherited from French colonial rule, as well as from the terror directed against civilians in the Black Decade, which destroyed existing solidarities and networks within Algerian society as a whole. In the case of women, there are of course other considerations, as outlined in the thesis. Healing the wounds of the Black Decade, however, is an essential first step for any potential reconciliation between Algerians, whether they have left the country or not. Amongst those who fled, reconciliation, tolerance and trust are the *sine qua non* condition to re-establishing a feeling of continuity with their Algerian identity. It is for this reason that the participants in this research rejected the Amnesty Law and saw it as an obstacle to their return since it has not permitted the nation to heal.

In this era of high levels of displacement and population movement, and as Amin Malouf explains in his book, *Murderous Identities* (1998), it is those of us who have succeeded in building a new self, proudly holding to where we come from as well as to

who we have now become, who can play the role of bridging different communities, cultures and religions, and building a safe and peaceful transnational space. If the process of 're-selving' is successful, as it appears to have been for the majority of participants in this study, returning home is no longer an overriding concern. Therefore, I deduce that both the definitions of diaspora and exile can be applied here, perhaps in the form of an 'exilic diaspora'. Exile culture is located at the intersection of the other cultures that these individuals have found refuge in, and they cannot and perhaps do not wish to be described by one unique identity that restrains them in a culture of 'diaspora'.

However, although the process of 're-selving' has given new meaning to the idea of self and belonging amongst participants, their memories appear to have remained to a certain extent embedded in a nostalgic sorrow caused by their exile and dispersal, causing them to invent an imagined Algeria – a democratic, secular state in which religious tolerance and gender equality are guaranteed – that has never corresponded to the reality. However, returning on vacation, visiting online newspapers or interacting via blogs with other women still living in the country have made participants increasingly aware that this Algeria not only never existed but perhaps, for the majority of the Algerian people, is not even on their agenda. One example of this appeared to be the re-election of Bouteflika for an (unconstitutional) fourth term, despite his long and disabling illness. Discourses expressing dissent went viral, and small groups opposing the re-election were created and protests organised, particularly in Algiers and Paris. However, by re-electing Bouteflika in April 2014, the majority of the Algerian population seemed to be telling the world that what they required above all was security and stability, which they believed his presidency provided (as explained in Chapter Six). This was regardless of the fact that running for a fourth term was an undemocratic act. The geopolitical chaos in the region following the suppression of the Arab Spring appears to have persuaded many ordinary Algerians that democracy, as defined by the west, would bring neither peace nor a solution to their daily struggles for survival.

There were many other examples revealed by this research of how those highly skilled, educated women who were driven into exile during the Black Decade are now disconnected from the aspirations of ordinary Algerians. In this context, the research also

noted the beginnings among many Algerians living abroad, alongside those migrants and exiles of other cultures who have been forced, or who have elected, to live in the transnational space, of the idea of belonging to a global class and partaking in a form of global citizenship that transcends both their original and new cultural locations (Naficy, 1993). Accordingly, it appears that original nationalities matter less since a new ‘imagined identity’ has been created, one that crosses borders and creates its own community.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

One argument that has emerged throughout this study is that even in times of conflict or war there is no clear distinction to be made between women forced to escape cultures of gender-based violence and harsh patriarchal rules and those forced to flee due to political persecution and violence. As seen most forcefully in Lamia’s story, and echoed by those of the other participants in this research, the reason many of these women fled was first and foremost gender-related persecution, coupled with the experience of daily violence and terror, and this holds true even for those who also fled targeted political violence and personal death threats. Despite the introduction of gender guidelines in the asylum processes of many countries and by the UNHCR, as detailed in Chapter Five, there is still much work to do to raise awareness amongst those involved in reviewing women’s asylum claims in order to consolidate the recognition in the international asylum system that forms of gender-based violence are grounds for granting refugee status. This research shows that participants who did not claim political asylum were for the most part discouraged by the gender-blind asylum regime, and they missed the opportunity to bring to wider attention the violence suffered by those women who remained in Algeria.

Apart from the radical insecurity due to the lack of administrative status many women migrants are forced to endure as a consequence of the failure to recognise gender-based persecution, my fieldwork also revealed further obstacles faced by participants in attempting to adjust to lives in their new societies. These varied from the non-recognition of Algerian qualifications and the lack of an organised and supportive Algerian community to more extreme forms of discrimination, often due to their nationality or assumed support of radical Islam and terrorism, as exemplified by Nadia’s experience in

France. Despite these barriers, participants showed a great deal of resilience, although this needs far more social and institutional recognition, support and nurturing.

Furthermore, despite existing suspicions, mistrust and political divergences among those who migrated during this period, the survey had a high number of participants. Through their participation, they demonstrated the existence of a wide series of networks, including online networks, among those highly skilled women who had fled during the Black Decade and its aftermath. Whether or not such networks can be mobilised to act as a diaspora remains an open question and needs further investigation. However, by taking part in this research and recruiting their peers, these women exhibited a shared interest in the topic of diasporic networks and the potential mobilisation of these networks for political change, not only in Algeria but also in the countries in which they now live. Again, undoubtedly their gender and level of education were key factors in overcoming the aforementioned residual suspicions and divergences, giving credence to the arguments of the social constructionist critics against the classical conception of diaspora.

None of the participants intended to return. This finding is not new in itself: research into women's diaspora and migrant women has revealed that, in general, females resist the idea of returning home more than their male counterparts (Abdelhady, 2011). However, the main difference here is that highly skilled migrants women also displayed a detailed awareness of the current problems in their country of origin and appeared to have many ideas as to how these could be fixed. Several participants to this research, and other members of my network, had even returned to Algeria, offering their experience, skills and competence in setting up projects, but left again because of the bureaucracy, general corruption and more importantly the lack of women's rights and the increasingly radical Islamisation of society. Participants have a very lucid idea about what they think has gone wrong with the amnesty law implemented in 2005, and the post-conflict peace building in the country which they considered a failed process. Lamia has precisely insisted on establishing the truth before considering any reconciliation or forgiveness. This research may be a first step towards the establishment of the narrative of the Algerian Black Decade, viewed by women in exile from a gender perspective. Participants also frequently denounced what many perceive as a radical Islamisation of Algerian society, which restricts women's freedom, and whose conservative beliefs and culture are alien to the

traditional Maghrebi practice of a peaceful, tolerant form of Islam. For this reason, many of the participants called for the urgent imposition of secularism as the only way for the nation to restore peace and unity, despite the fact that this view is not necessarily shared by Algerian women still living in the country.

When compared with other diasporic groups who have successfully managed to mobilise and transfer knowledge and technology to their countries of origin, Algerians appear to have lacked the initiative to do so. However, the participants in this research readily shared ideas on how they think the situation could be fixed 'back home'. They put forward many ideas on how the nation can be helped to recover from its trauma. Indeed, the lack of social cohesion and the crisis of identity in Algeria, including the language crisis and the entrenched regionalism inherited from the colonial era, need to be urgently addressed in consultation with an organised civil society that involves highly skilled Algerian women living abroad. For this to happen, it is increasingly important to find ways of mobilising the existing networks revealed in this research. Regarding the role of officials, women in particular will have to exert more effort to overcome the patriarchal attitudes seemingly embedded in Algerian consulates and diplomatic offices. For example, many of the women I met during the course of this study reported incidents that revealed the lack of knowledge and will on the part of Algerian officials when it comes to implementing new amendments to the Family Code in favour of women's rights. Consulates could become more open to enabling a process of reform by providing the space for meetings and perhaps other kinds of logistical support to all those concerned with capacity building amongst Algerian women living abroad. This is important because, as Nadia explained in Chapter Six, when attempting to set up a community group in the receiving country it is often necessary to demonstrate that it concerns local issues rather than projects related to the country of origin, and this often discourages the practical establishment of diasporic networks.

For all this to happen, however, the Algerian regime needs to first acknowledge the potential existence of a diaspora that is prepared to engage in working for the benefit of the country. Algerian policy-makers need to engage with highly skilled women living abroad by improving services at consulates, reducing bureaucracy and fighting corruption in the administration, which are often perceived as barriers to returning home. It is also



important to build partnerships between Algeria and the receiving countries in order to facilitate social enterprises and the transfer of goods and services. The fundamental requirement, however, as far as this research is concerned, is to ensure the effective implementation of existing laws and to design new policies and guidelines that will assist women and protect them from the violence and discrimination they still experience in their daily lives in Algeria, particularly as these factors have been identified as one of the main barriers that the participants face to returning to the country from which they fled.

The fact that the group under investigation is of one gender and more or less the same education class helps to investigate it using the constructionist views on the concept. Under the condition that this group heals from its trauma, the second generation of this particular set of Algerian migrants is likely to evolve into a mobilized diaspora that is worth to study.

In relation to the wider body of knowledge on the subject, my research can be divided into two key strands: How to conceptualise diaspora and the best methodological approach to take to explore the concept. The contribution I believe my research offers to the discipline is that, over the course of my investigation, I have found a structure that provides an innovative way of addressing these two key questions, and which could be of benefit to future research.

**Appendix I:** This was an oral presentation at the Viva on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2016.

Good afternoon. I would like to say a few words to introduce you as to why I have conducted this research and why I have used the concept diaspora, not as a word to describe a group of migrants, but as an investigative device, in order to conduct the research.

I left Algeria as a highly qualified woman, nearly at the end of the black decade, in 2003. And so, I have witnessed the departure of hundreds of colleagues fleeing the country. In fact, only in the research centers I was representing in the union branch of high education and scientific research, in between 1993 and 2003, around twenty PhDs, senior researchers, research assistants, have left the country, half of them being women. This was one of the most distressing issues happening in Algeria at the time. Hundreds of students were left without teachers, lecturers and supervisors, several research projects were abandoned, patients were left without consultants, and so on.

Once I arrived to the UK, I met two Algerian females, who had been university lecturers back home, and had then been dispersed to Wales under the Asylum process. Unlike me, the two were holding their PhDs from the UK, had left the UK after finishing their studies and had come back to flee terrorism. Despite that, they were both struggling with adjustment and the process of rebuilding a professional life. The main barrier was the endless gender-blind asylum process they found themselves in. I was luckier because my claim was based on my husband's activities as journalist/intellectual and so was recognized as a dependent of a political refugee. I also knew of many other highly skilled women in France and Canada, often graduated from France, facing barriers in finding jobs related to their high profile, particularly lawyers and doctors in medicine.

My master dissertation looked at the effect of forced migration on women's wellbeing, and so I was already aware of the lack of literature and scholarships available for study for highly skilled migrant women in general. There was none on the Algerian case.

On the other side, the Algerian regime was denying any mass exodus of highly skilled Algerians due to the black decade, and definitely not recognizing any feminization of highly skilled Algerian migration as a result of the cancellation of the electoral process.

My thesis was then to argue against this and to reveal the existence of a network of highly qualified/highly skilled Algerian women who fled the country at the time.

My interest in using the original definition of Diaspora as a concept was grounded on the general assumption that Algerians do not show solidarity amongst each other or constitute a Diaspora as such. In contrast, it was also due to a demand for it within my initial network, including online network, particularly following the immolation of the fruit-sellers that triggered a revolution in Tunisia, and later on the whole region. Algiers also had its riots in December 2010.

Women on face book, expressed a need of sharing with their social networking Tunisians and Egyptians friends, the bloody Algerian experience of the black decade. In between Algerian women, existed regrets not to have formed a diasporic space that could be mobilized to present evidence for the Algerian experience, and the reality of the collective trauma amongst those survivors of the black decade. Although men also contributed to

this online discussion, women created platforms, blogs and facebook groups to share concerns and opinions in order to understand why Algerians abroad never keep solidarity networks and mobilization around issues affecting their country of origin.

And so, my research was to explore the network using the social constructionist critic of the original definition of diaspora as a concept, to say that migrants in general, do not necessarily connect to show solidarity amongst each other only due to sharing the same ethnicity or nationality.

Rather, Gender, social class and other identity markers shape how migrants connect to each other, to their new environment and more importantly to the idea of returning “home”. I engaged my research on verifying a social constructionist critic in the context of the mass exodus provoked by the traumatic Algerian black decade.

As explained in the thesis, I have explored the various groups that have been called “Diaspora”, including those who have been named “latent Diaspora” awaiting for that event happening back home or in new countries that mobilize the group and create a diaspora politics, and solidarity.

According to the original definition, a group of migrants does not establish itself as a diaspora upon arrival; the dispersal should have been provoked by a traumatic event. I worked out my own definition of the group, exploring those who are highly qualified, (which is what defines the middle class in Algeria), women who had left following the tragedy of the black decade, which contrasts with previous feminization of the Algerian migration.

It is important to note that the Algerian migration flux of the 1990s is one of the only mass exoduses that have been provoked by a traumatic event in the post-colonial Algerian history. Thus, it makes it relevant to be explored using the concept of diaspora, as a heuristic devise, since it is expected to develop a political diaspora consciousness if the traditional definition of the concept is applied.

How I conducted the research?

In relation to the wider body of knowledge on the subject, my research can be divided into two key strands: How to conceptualise diaspora and the best methodological approach to take to explore the concept. The contribution I believe my research offers to the discipline is that, over the course of my investigation, I have found a structure that provides an innovative way of addressing these two key questions, and which could be of benefit to future research. Geographically locating participants was an important task for my research, as well as showing that members of the revealed network were linked to each other with the set of criterion that compose a diaspora and correspond to my working definition. I used Respondent-driven sampling (RDS) to recruit my respondents. I came across this method when looking at methodology to locate hard to reach population and see how they connect with each other.

However using RDS was time-consuming, stressful awaiting time expecting it to work. Then learning how to use the program was costly. The main issue was transferring excel spreadsheet data into RDS program which was free to download from their website. I spent nearly 1 month in trying to train myself and sort out the problem. I sought help from IT and methodology Department at the LSE with no success. Then contacted the team, who said there was an error on the program but were happy to transfer my data if I were to send them my spreadsheets. I decided that it would have breached confidentiality of my participants. I then came to the conclusion that none of my supervisors or examiners will be statisticians and abandoned the data analysis side of the method. Although the data analysis would have answered some important questions, it would not have given justice to individual experiences of the women I was researching. So, I decided to explain that it was used to locate and identify participants, to give a wide picture of who the research was about.

I was committed to approaching my research using a feminist framework. It would be dishonest to say that I was neutral: my own position and political beliefs have played a major role in conducting the research data analysis. Following the few months break I took from my thesis during my moving to London, I was attending lectures, public and private Algerian gatherings. This has proven to be a very enriching experience in the sense that I was reflecting on data previously collected. It was also a time when my director of studies in Swansea resigned and my academic support broke down. Then I met academics from UEL who told me about its school of sciences' methodological approach in studying migration that was more qualitative and about collecting narratives. Although I had already conducted interviews with women who participated to the survey, my reflection on the way they were conducted and the responses made me realise that I needed more interviews to construct a narrative and answer my questions. This is when Lamia came into the picture and was interviewed after that break. Her interview marks the move from one city to another, one department to another but also my reflection/improvement on my field work. For example, in interviewing Lamia, I made all efforts highlighting the importance of engaging highly skilled women leaving in the diaspora in the process of healing, truth and reconciliation back home. Transferring to UEL positively shifted the course of my research, at a time when I was about to suspend/abandon my PhD.

- Lamia's narrative covered several themes. Dividing them into 2 chapters in which different sets of sub-themes which have been addressed was a very challenging intellectual exercise, and I was lucky that my supervisors supported me and helped me to meet that challenge. Chapter 6 was to link other interviews and data with Lamia's arguments, but also a try giving justice to other interesting issues revealed in survey and other data. Only few interviews were used as not all, although very rich, answered key questions my thesis interrogates. There is always a desire to give justice to all data collected, but as researchers, we know that it is not always possible. In my case, it would need another thesis and so I may instead use those interviews in writing articles for the future. The key issues to retain from all, was the trauma related to participant's forced migration and their degree of resilience to respond to it. The main challenge was to link all the data with Lamia's story in

a way to help the reader to understand my findings. Interviews in chapter six were also chosen in order to fill gaps in answering key questions of my research that were not covered by Lamia, such as the linguistic conflicts between francophone and arabophone, which, according to the findings of this research, was a key element grounding the conflict in the 1990s and a key identity-marker which divides the Algerian society including those living abroad. The unchronological way Lamia told her story not only reveals her personal trauma and the non-sense she could make of it, but to me, it was a revelation of a collective trauma as, until now, the majority of the Algerians who experienced the horrors of the black decade, have not made any sense of it. The very few researches conducted about those who have been persecuted, or pushed to exile during the black decade, are on the experience of French speaking writers, journalists and other politicians as seen in my literature review. In general, it is in the collective consciousness that refugees are normally poet, journalist, writer or a political/union activist. Bourdieu/Derrida called to protect those “intellectuals” assassinated by fundamentalists. “Genocide against intellectuals” was also mentioned by academics such as Karima Bennoun. In fact, the majority of interviewees presented themselves as persecuted by radical Islamists because they were intellectuals educated in French and embedded by French/western culture or communist. I found great materials to challenge this in Lamia’s narrative. She was an ordinary English teacher, not from a culturally French influenced family. She escaped her father’s rules /her village only to fully exert her rights as an educated woman, but she ended up experiencing sexual harassment, regional/gender discrimination and random terrorist attacks along her journey. Although she mentioned RCD (a secular political party), Lamia was not affiliated with any political party. She did not belong to any network in Algiers and so never had an adequate job related to her studies. I know too well how it was impossible to survive in these conditions, I was fascinated by her degree of resilience and her success in surmounting “Kilimanjaro”, facing a deeply implemented patriarchal mentality, all on her own.

- Lamia is one of the few participants who lived and worked in those very dangerous areas. Her narrative went deeply into talking about what other women had often briefly mentioned: random terrorist attacks and their traumatic effects on people, the wider population and on those who are forced to exile. Unlike Lamia, others briefly mentioned terrorist attacks, possibly not seen as essential to share with me because I was supposed to/expected to know everything about it. Lamia decided and convinced me that it was very important to mention this in my research. Lamia’s narrative, supported by the others, highlighted that the trauma is still there, and provoked a rupture in the construction of what it meant to be Algerian women in the post-colonial era.
- The purpose of going into much details about her pre-departure, was a call to speak out the plight of many other highly skilled Algerian women she knows, that are still stuck in the asylum process in the UK. Lamia said that she has “done her homework” when presenting evidence to an Asylum adjudicator and is now a good advocate for gender-based asylum claim.

### **My research results:**

- She was an ordinary English teacher, not from a culturally French influenced family. She escaped her father's rules /her village only to fully exert her rights as an educated woman, but she ended up experiencing sexual harassment, regional/gender discrimination and random terrorist attacks along her journey. Although she mentioned RCD (a secular political party), Lamia was not affiliated with any political party. She did not belong to any network in Algiers and so never had an adequate job related to her studies. I know too well how it was impossible to survive in these conditions, I was fascinated by her degree of resilience and her success in surmounting "Kilimanjaro", facing a deeply implemented patriarchal mentality, all on her own.
- Lamia is one of the few participants who lived and worked in those very dangerous areas. Her narrative went deeply into talking about what other women had often briefly mentioned: random terrorist attacks and their traumatic effects on people, the wider population and on those who are forced to exile. Unlike Lamia, others briefly mentioned terrorist attacks, possibly not seen as essential to their experience. Lamia decided and convinced me that it was very important to mention this as the main source of the trauma. Lamia's narrative, although supported by the others, was the one that highlighted most that the trauma is still there, and provoked a rupture in the construction of what it meant to be Algerian women in the post-colonial era.
- Her narrative is also a call to speak out the plight of many other Algerian women she knows who are still stuck in the UK asylum process. She now sees herself as a good advocate for gender-based asylum claim.

The majority of participants expressed concerns about bad governance in Algeria. This they see as a direct result of the amnesty law, which absolved radical Islamists and wrongdoers without any prosecutions for the murders that took place, or even official recognition of their crimes. Lamia went into this in much greater depth than any of the other participants. She said that "the army was supposed to protect us but didn't", and made the strong statement that she will never be able to consider Algeria as home until the truth is known and justice given to the families of the victims and survivors. I, personally, concur.

None of the participants intended to return. This finding is not new in itself: research into women's diaspora and migrant women has revealed that, in general, females resist the idea of returning home more than their male counterparts (Abdelhady, 2011). However, the main difference here is that these highly educated women also displayed a detailed awareness of the current problems in their country of origin and appeared to have many ideas as to how these could be fixed. Several participants to this research, and other members of my network, had even returned to Algeria, offering their experience, skills and competence in setting up projects, but left again because of the bureaucracy, general corruption and more importantly the lack of women's rights and the increasingly radical Islamisation of society. Participants have a very lucid idea about what they think has gone wrong with the amnesty law, and the post-conflict peace building in the country which they considered a failed process. The attachment to an imagined Algeria is still there, but the capability to re-invent and embrace new transnational identities was also very palpable among my participants. This was reinforced and motivated by a desire to rebuild their professional identities abroad. As they appeared to exhibit on the one hand, a sense of exile, and on the other, a desire to be part of a diaspora, I called the group an exilic-diaspora, awaiting that "event" around which the network will mobilise."

Algerian migration flux of the 1990s is one of the only mass exoduses that have been provoked by a traumatic event in the post-colonial Algerian history. Thus, it makes it relevant to be explored using the concept of diaspora, which is expected to develop a political diaspora consciousness if the traditional definition of the concept is applied.

The fact that the group under investigation is of one gender and more or less the same education class helps to investigate it using the constructionist views on the concept. Under the condition that this group heals from its trauma, the second generation of this particular set of Algerian migrants is likely to evolve into a mobilized diaspora that is worth to study.

## Appendix II: Interview Consent Form

### Consent form to take part in a PhD research project

School of Science, Centre for Migration Policy Research, Swansea University

### Women of the new Algerian Diaspora: Online Networks, Social Consciousness and Political Engagement

Name of the supervisor: Prof. Heaven Crawley

Name of the student: Latefa Narriman Guemar

I understand that my participation in this interview is voluntary

☐

I am free to withdraw from it at any time

☐

I give permission for the student to record the interview

☐

I give permission to the supervisor to have access to my anonymous responses

☐

I understand that the interview will only be used for this PhD thesis writing purpose and will automatically be destroyed as soon as the research is finished.

☐

**Under no circumstances, your personal data will be revealed. They are to be used only and strictly for the research purposes. Please complete and sign TWO copies of this form. One copy will be retained by the interviewee and one will be given to you for future reference**

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of the student

Signature

Date



### **Appendix III: Consent Form for Questionnaire (English Version)**

#### **Semi-structured questionnaires for in-depth interviews**

**College of Science, Centre for Migration Policy Research, Swansea University**

**Title: Women of the New Algerian Diaspora: Online Networks, Social Consciousness and Political Engagement**

#### **Summary:**

The research is to explore the motives of highly skilled Algerian women who emigrated during the 1990s, including the lack of personal freedom, the restrictions associated with Algerian Family Law, and the increased levels of violence in Algeria. It looks at the agendas and expectations of this particular set of migrants and the extent to which they feel they belong to a Diaspora, or if any, to a digital Diaspora, organized with the aim of helping to combat abuses of women's human rights in Algeria. The interview might take a form of conversation if this is what you prefer but I have a set of questions to ask you first:

1. Can you please introduce yourself?
2. If you feel comfortable, can you tell us in which circumstances you had to leave Algeria?
3. How do you feel about these circumstances?
4. How would you describe your journey to the hosting country?
5. How difficult was it for you to rebuild your life here?
6. How would you describe your sense of belonging to an Algerian Network/culture? To the hosting country/culture? Or to any other particular place(s)?
7. What strategies have you/or not used to engage in political changes in Algeria?
8. If yes, how difficult is for you to engage in project in Algeria, from abroad?
9. Is there anything you would like to add, that has not been mentioned in this interview?

Please leave your name, address or an e-mail or your skype or your face book account if you would like me to send you a summary of my thesis

Name:.....

Address.....

e-mail address .....

## **Appendix IV: Survey Questionnaire (English Version)**

### **Research on Algerian Women Diaspora**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project

#### **About me**

My name is Latefa Guemar. I am an Algerian woman who left Algeria in 2003 .I am currently a PhD student at Swansea University (Wales, UK) in the Centre for Migration Policy Research, and I am also a Visiting Fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), undertaking my research in the field of Gender and Migration. I have a Masters in Science in Population Movements and Policies, and my dissertation (2011) focused on the impact of forced migration on women's lives.

#### **What is the purpose of the research?**

This research is conducted in order to better understand the experiences of highly qualified Algerian women who left their homeland following the internal political instability of the 1990s.

This research aims to make recommendations to international organisations that influence policies concerning the barriers which Algerian women face in rebuilding their professional lives in the country where they live. The research also aims to contribute to the opportunities of women if they decide to return to Algeria: their rights to access pensions and other social protection, and the recognition of their professional experiences.

In order to make these recommendations I need your valuable contribution. **Thank you in advance.**

#### **How can you contribute?**

First, please complete the survey. The survey asks you about the circumstances of your departure from Algeria, your life abroad, whether or not you belong to an Algerian network and whether or not you intend to return to Algeria.

Secondly, please forward the link to this survey to other Algerian women abroad – at least one, but ideally three or more Algerian women who you know and meet the following criteria.

- Highly qualified: holding a higher education diploma, degree, or equivalent or higher-level qualification, and
- Living abroad, having left Algeria after 1990.

This will help to ensure that the survey reaches the maximum number of respondents. We are interested in the experiences of highly-qualified Algerian women regardless of their legal status, profession or country where they are living.

Data collected FOR this survey WILL REMAIN strictly confidential and under no circumstances, your personal information will be disclosed. DATA WILL BE USED for research purposes ONLY.

NB: You may have left Algeria before the 1990s but could not return when the violence started, if so please feel included in this research.

**My supervisors are:**

Prof. Heaven Crawley ACSS, Director of the Centre for Migration Policy Research

Swansea University

Dr Tom Cheesman, Language Department, Swansea University

**1. Questions about your circumstance of leaving Algeria**

**1. When did you leave Algeria? \***

- ☒ Between 1990 and 1995
- ☒ Between 1996 and 2000
- ☒ After 2000
- ☒ Before 1990 but I couldn't return because of the instability in the country

**2. Did you leave Algeria as a:\***

- ☐ Student
- ☐ Labour migrant
- ☐ Refugee
- ☐ Spouse
- ☐ Illegal migrant
- ☐ Don't want to say

**3. When you left Algeria, were you :\***

- ☒ Under 25 years old
- ☒ Between 25 and 35 years old
- ☒ Between 36 and 40 years old
- ☒ Between 41 and 50 years old
- ☒ 51 or over

---

**4. What was your highest qualification when you left Algeria?**

- ☐ University degree
- ☐ Postgraduate qualification in Social Science
- ☐ Postgraduate qualification in Technology
- ☐ Professional qualification in Medical Science
- ☐ Other (please specify):

Please provide detail of your speciality if you wish to do so

---

**5. Were you working in Algeria? \***

- ☐ Yes (please go to question 7)
- ☐ No (please go to question 6)

---

**6. Why were you not working in Algeria?**

- ☐ unable to find a job
- ☐ Family restrictions
- ☐ Social restrictions
- ☐ Other (please specify):

---

**7. Were you satisfied with the job you were doing?**

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Neither satisfied or unsatisfied
- ☐ not satisfied
- ☐ very unsatisfied

---

**8. What was your marital status before you left Algeria?\***

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Don't want to say

## 2. Questions about your life experiences abroad

### 9. Where do you live currently? \*

- ☐ France
- ☐ Canada
- ☐ UK
- ☐ USA
- ☐ other (please specify):

### 10. Can you tell us the name of the city where you live

### 11. Are you working/studying now? \*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

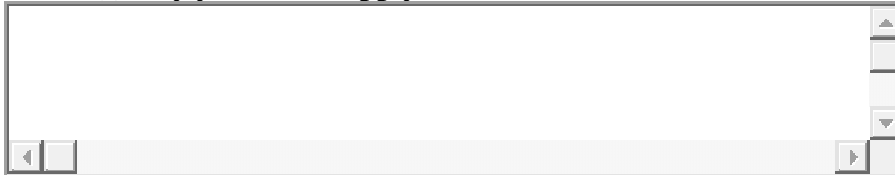
### 12. If yes, what is your profession now?

- ☐ Student
- ☐ Researcher
- ☐ Reader/Lecturer or Tutor in University or equivalent institution
- ☐ Teacher or working in High/Primary School
- ☐ Business manager
- ☐ Community project manager/worker
- ☐ Doctor/Nurse/Dentiste/Pharmacologist
- ☐ Self employed
- ☐ Other (please specify):

### 13. Have you ever applied for a course/degree in the country where you live now?

- ☐ Yes (go to question 13)
- ☐ No

**14. Since you are already highly qualified from Algeria , please explain briefly the reason(s) why you had to apply to an additional course?**



**15. In your opinion, have you ever not been employed or accepted in a course because of your : (you can tick more than one )\***

- ☐ Gender
- ☐ Nationality
- ☐ Age
- ☐ Religion
- ☐ Ethnicity
- ☐ Race
- ☐ Legal status
- ☐ Lack of funding
- ☐ Language barrier
- ☐ Other (please specify):



**16. What is your marital status now?**

- ☒ Single
- ☒ Married
- ☒ Divorced
- ☒ Widowed
- ☒ Don't want to say

**17. What is your highest qualification now?\***

- ☒ Graduate in another field than from Algeria
- ☒ Postgraduate in another field than from Algeria
- ☒ Same qualifications than from Algeria

### 3. Question regarding your integration in your hosting country

**18. Do you consider yourself as part of an Algerian network/ belonging to an Algerian network?\***

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**19. What does belonging to an Algerian network means to you?**

- ☐ Be part of a community
- ☐ Nothing
- ☐ Don't know

**20. Do you think that belonging to an Algerian network can help you:  
( you can tick more than one)**

- ☐ Meet other Algerians in order to share your experiences
- ☐ Integrate into the hosting society
- ☐ Find a job
- ☐ Create and nurture your idea of return to Algeria
- ☐ Other (please specify):

**21. Do you go to Algerian events and gatherings ?\***

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No ( go to question 23)

**22. What type of gatherings do you prefer to attend?**

- ☐ Cultural
- ☐ Political
- ☐ Religious
- ☐ Private/Familial
- ☐ Academic talks /conferences/ seminars
- ☐ Other (please specify):

**23. Do you usually prefer to gather with other Algerians from/of the same:**

- ☐ Gender
- ☐ Profession
- ☐ Age range
- ☐ Political opinion
- ☐ Region/city in Algeria
- ☐ It doesn't matter: they just have to be Algerian
- ☐ Other (please specify):

**24. If you don't prefer to attend Algerian gatherings at all, briefly explain the main reasons why:**

**25. What is the main language you use when speaking to your family, children and/or Algerian friends now? \***

- ☐ Algerian dialect
- ☐ Berber
- ☐ Arabic
- ☐ French
- ☐ English
- ☐ Other (please specify):

**26. What does 'integration' mean for you? (You can tick more than one ) \***

- ☐ Exerting citizenship (naturalisation, vote etc.)
- ☐ Having Successful family life
- ☐ Having your qualifications recognised
- ☐ Finding a job and paying taxes
- ☐ Rebuilding a successful career



- ☐ Other (please specify):

**27. To what degree do you feel integrated into the society where you live?**

- ☐ Strongly integrated
- ☐ Fairly Integrated
- ☐ Neither integrated or non-integrated
- ☐ Fairly non- integrated
- ☐ Strongly non-integrated

**4. Question regarding communication with Algeria/Algerian?**

**28. What is the main tools do you use to be informed on national and international news ?**

- ☐ TV
- ☐ Radio
- ☐ Internet
- ☐ News papers
- ☐ Other (please specify):

**29. Do you use the internet to communicate and share informations with friends , family and others? \***

- ☒ Yes
- ☒ No

**30. If yes, what are the main social online network sites do you use ?  
(You can tick more than one box)**

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Youtube
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ Skype
- ☐ e-mail lists
- ☐ Other (please specify):

**31. Do you particularly share or forward information that is more related to women's rights in Algeria? \***

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**32. Do you still have family and friends in Algeria? \***

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**33. By what other means do you connect with family and friends in Algeria?**

- ☐ Viber on Iphone
- ☐ Mobilephone
- ☐ Landline
- ☐ Other (please specify):

**34. If you have a Facebook account, how often do you login?**

- ☐ Only once a day
- ☐ Many times a day
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Don't want to say
- ☐ Other (please specify):

**35. Do you comment online? \***

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**36. If not, briefly say why you do not comment online?**

**37. Are you a member of any professional e-mail list?**

- ☐ No
- ☐ in the country where you live
- ☐ International network
- ☐ Algerian only network
- ☐ Other (please specify):

**5. Questions about returning to Algeria**

**38. Do you miss Algeria? \***

- ☒ Yes ( go to question 39)
- ☒ No ( go to question 40)
- ☒ Not sure

**39. What do you miss most about Algeria? (you can tick more than one)**

- ☐ Music
- ☐ Food
- ☐ Weather
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Activism
- ☐ Life style
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Other (please specify):

**40. When was the last time you visited Algeria?**

- ☒ Within the last year
- ☒ Between 1 and 2 years ago
- ☒ Between 2 and 5 years ago
- ☒ Between 5 and 10 years ago
- ☒ More than 10 years ago
- ☒ Never

**41. Do you think you could/will live in Algeria in the future? \***

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

**42. Do you think there are any barriers preventing women like you to return to Algeria? \***

- ☒ Yes ( go to question 43)
- ☒ No ( go to question 44)
- ☒ Don't know

**43. If yes, please give detail of the barriers you think exist:**

- ☐ Social
- ☐ Economical
- ☐ Political
- ☐ Familial
- ☐ Other ( please specify)

**44. Do you have any concrete project / job offer to return? Please explain briefly**

**45. Is there anything you would like to add that has not been mentioned in this questionnaire?**

**THANK YOU, I feel honoured that you have accepted to answer my survey**

Please do not forget to forward the survey to other women of your network.  
Remember: The country where they live, the legal status they have and their profession are not important, as long as they are highly qualified Algerian women who left following the political instability and the rise of violence during the 1990s.

Please contact me if you have any enquiry about the survey.

Also please e-mail me if you would like to receive a copy of my thesis.  
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